

# An Indian Guru and His Western Disciples



# An Indian Guru and His Western Disciples

Representation and Communication of Charisma in  
the Hare Krishna Movement

Kimmo Ketola

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# Abstract

Kimmo Ketola, University of Helsinki, FIN

## **An Indian Guru and His Western Disciples: Representation and Communication of Charisma in the Hare Krishna Movement**

The Hare Krishna movement, officially known as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), is a branch of Vaiṣṇavism founded by Indian monk A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda (1896-1977) for the purpose of vigorous missions in Western societies. Since the founding of the organisation in New York in 1966, the movement has spread very rapidly throughout the Western world.

Numerous anthropological and sociological studies have attempted to account for the success of the movement in terms of cultural and social dynamics of the post-war American society. This study, however, focuses on the charisma of the movement's leader. The aim of the study was to describe and analyse the nature of the charismatic representations held by the disciples in such a way that insight into the processes of their acquisition and transmission can be gained.

The main material for this study consists of published biographical and autobiographical writings of Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda's earliest disciples. Some use has also been made of the writings of the founder himself and other theological and official documents produced by the movement. Participant observation and other fieldwork techniques were used to obtain information on the rituals and everyday life within the movement to complement the written sources.

The material has been analysed within the framework of cognitive science of religion. The findings of the study indicate, firstly, that the disciples' representations of the founder-guru always include some element of mysteriousness, consisting of representations involving counterintuitiveness, essentialism and notions of a special kind of agency. Secondly, the study indicates that the representations characterised by mysteriousness gained their "infectious" quality and persuasiveness through the characteristic mood changes produced in intense ritual activity. It was therefore suggested that the cross-cultural

transmission of religious symbolism concerning the charisma of the leader was initially based on a complex process of combining mood-altering rituals and memorable situations with relevant conceptual mysteries.

## Acknowledgements

At times, humanistic research may seem a very individual project. After all, much of the research done in libraries and especially the writing require solitude. However, in looking back at the development of this study, I become keenly aware of the vitally important contributions that numerous people and institutions have made.

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## Note on transliteration

The technical Sanskrit terms that appear throughout the text are presented according to standard transliteration procedures. They have also been italicised, except in the case of a few well-known ones, such as 'yoga', 'mantra' and 'guru'. However, some names of persons, institutions and places are given according to their commonly used form without diacritical marks (e.g. Gandhi instead of Gāndhī). In the bibliography, the names of authors are given in the form that appears on the works cited. Long vowels in Sanskrit are distinguished from short ones by the macron (*ā*), except for the long vowels *e ai*, *o* and *au*. A subscript dot distinguishes retroflex consonants (*ṭ*, *ṭh*, *ḍ*, *ḍh*, *ṇ*), pronounced with the tongue positioned far back in the mouth. The sibilants *ṣ* and *ś* are pronounced as sh.



## SECTION ONE

# Introduction

### 1.1 The setting: a swami in New York

On the nineteenth of September in 1965, a lone Indian swami arrived into the New York harbour on a cargo ship from Calcutta. Dressed in an orange *dhotī* (a cotton cloth tied around waist) and an old shawl and bearing the clay markings of a Vaiṣṇava on his forehead, he was probably the only genuine Indian *sādhū* (holy man) in the city of New York. He was known by the name A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami.<sup>1</sup>

The monk's first few months in New York were arduous. He came on his own initiative, with no material support from fellow Vaiṣṇavas of his sect. However, by summer 1966, everything had changed in the swami's life. During the spring he had started to keep regular devotional classes in Bowery, home to a myriad of artists and students. By June, he had managed to rent a small storefront for a temple on 26 Second Avenue in the Lower East Side. The place soon started to attract the regular attendance of a few hippies. In July, he had incorporated his religious society, named the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON).

One day during that summer he lead his students to Tompkins Square Park for public singing of God's holy names in the form of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. The dancing and singing and the "Stay High Forever" flyers created a small sensation in the hippie movement. "Hare Kṛṣṇa people" soon became known to a wider audience. People began to flock into the storefront temple and newspapers wrote favourable, if somewhat astonished, articles.

The movement spread like wildfire. By January 1967, disciples were sent to open a temple in San Francisco. They managed to get a storefront in another hippie meeting place, the famous Haight-Ashbury district. Other branches were opened in Boston, Santa Fe, Los Angeles and Montreal. By 1968, missions were

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<sup>1</sup> The following brief account of his career is based on the official biography by Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami (1993a-f).

started in London and Germany. By April 1969, there were already 15 ISKCON centres; by July 1970, there were 34. In August 1970, a major preaching mission was launched in India. This time, the sensation was not created by public singing but by the presence of American devotees.

Throughout the 70's Bhaktivedanta Swami toured around the world recruiting disciples and encouraging them to set up temples wherever possible. By the time of his demise in November 1977, there were reputedly 108 temples and more than 4000 initiated disciples all over the world. During the 70's he also continued writing and publishing Kṛṣṇa conscious literature, which amounted to some sixty books by the time of his death.

His career as a religious founder and missionary was certainly extraordinary. One needs to appreciate that all these accomplishments were achieved in the brief span of 12 years. He was already sixty-nine years old when he arrived in New York. The seeds of his world-wide mission were sown long before he came to the West.

Bhaktivedanta Swami was born Abhay Charan De on the first of September in 1896 in Calcutta, just one day after an annual festival commemorating the birth of Kṛṣṇa. Although the De cloth merchant family was not itself very wealthy, it was related to a rich merchant family that had traded gold and salt for centuries and patronised the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa temple for the past 150 years.

Abhay's father Gour Mohan De was a pious Vaiṣṇava, who raised his son according to the traditional religious principles. For instance, when Abhay's mother, Rajani, wanted Abhay to receive an education in law in England, Gour Mohan dismissed the idea because he feared the degrading influence of the West. Young Abhay began his education in the prestigious Scottish Churches' College in Calcutta in 1916. His studies consisted of English, Sanskrit, philosophy and economics, but he also became interested in nationalist politics. Following Gandhi's call, Abhay in fact refused to accept his diploma from college as part of a demonstration, although he had passed the final exams.

Having finished his education in 1920, Abhay worked as a department manager in a chemical firm in Calcutta. During his college years his father had also arranged for his marriage. Two sons and two daughters were born out of this union. Apart perhaps from his moral uprightness, Abhay's life seemed to follow a rather ordinary course for an educated Calcuttan of the 1920's.

However, in 1922, a significant meeting took place that proved to be the turning point of Abhay's life. One of his friends had insisted one evening that they should go to meet a Bengali holy man. Abhay was not enthusiastic because he did not think highly of ascetics and miracle makers. The man they were to meet was Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura (1874 – 1936), who represented a particular strand of Vaiṣṇavism that originated with the devotional movement of Caitanya (1485 – 1534). Reportedly, the first thing he said to Abhay and his friend was that “You are educated young men. Why don't you preach Lord Caitanya's message throughout the whole world?” (Satsvarūpa 1993a, 39.) As a



supporter of Gandhi, Abhay expressed his opinion that the first concern should be with India's independence. He argued that nobody would listen to the religious message of a dependent country. However, Bhaktisiddhānta argued back that whether one power ruled or another was merely temporary, mundane politics. Certainly the first priority should be given to God's message rather than some man-made political ideal. Rulers come and go, whereas God's message is eternal. Abhay felt defeated by this argument and decided on the spot to become Bhaktisiddhānta's disciple.

Abhay's pharmaceutical businesses did not prosper and gradually his interests turned more and more to preaching. Finally, in 1950, he also came into conflict with his wife over religious principles. It is said that his wife was very fond of drinking tea, which was prohibited by Abhay's strict religious standards. One day Abhay found out that his wife had sold his copy of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in order to buy tea biscuits. Abhay was so shocked by this irreverence that he left his family and moved into a religious *āśrama*. Nine years later, he was initiated into the renounced order of *sannyāsa* and given the name Abhay Caraṇāravinda Bhaktivedānta Swami.

Freed from his domestic responsibilities, Bhaktivedānta Swami decided to start writing books, as his guru had recommended years before. Thus, he started the monumental work of translating and making commentaries on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* — a massive scripture which contains 18 000 verses in 12 volumes. His life's work had begun to take shape, the core of which was crystallised into one bold idea, at once both religious and political. He was completely convinced that an English language presentation of this particular sacred scripture would create a revolution "in a misdirected civilisation" (SB 1. Preface).

By 1965, he had managed to publish his first three volumes and thought himself ready for an even bigger step: to go preaching to the Westerners personally. Through great difficulties, he managed to obtain the official authorisation and sponsorship for travel to America.

What is perhaps most significant in this story is that the usual elements of legend associated with illustrious religious founders are absent. His birth is not surrounded by miraculous occurrences. His conversion seems to have been of a completely intellectual kind. The popular biographies that devotees have written about his life do not contain accounts of dramatic visionary experiences or supernatural abilities of healing and miracle-making. On the face of it, his religious life seems strangely sober and low-key for a religious founder.

Prior to coming to the West, Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda<sup>2</sup> had no disciples; within only a couple of years after arriving in New York, he had hundreds

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<sup>2</sup> The devotees commonly refer to him as "Śrīla Prabhupāda" or simply "Prabhupāda." The name was adopted in 1968. Before that, he was usually simply addressed as "Swamiji". The name "Prabhupāda" is said to signify one at whose feet (*pāda*) lie many masters (*prabhu*), or one who is always at the "lotusfeet" of Kṛṣṇa. (Satsvarūpa 1983b, 142.) For the sake of brevity, I will use the latter name henceforth.

of them. One is forced to wonder: How did this happen? What made his movement so attractive to youth in America and Europe? The usual charismatic attractions of ecstasies, visions, healings and miracles are simply not there. Did the secret lie in the ideological message? Or was it rather his extraordinary personality that was so appealing? What exactly took place during those first few years of his stay in the West?

It is these kinds of broad questions that have formed the basis for the present research. As it happens, I am not the only one asking these questions. A number of observers — both scholarly and non-scholarly — have felt obliged to seek answers to the riddle. The Hare Kṛṣṇa movement has attracted a great deal of sociological and anthropological research that has touched upon these issues already. In fact, there is a venerable scholarly tradition of interpretation of what is generally called ‘new religious movements’ (NRMs) and their appeal in the West.

The approach and methodology of the previous research differs, however, rather significantly from the approach I have chosen. To shed light on the direction taken here, I shall first review earlier major research on the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement.

## 1.2 Previous studies of ISKCON

The first major ethnography and still a classic study of the movement is J. Stillson Judah’s *Hare Krishna and the Counterculture* (1974a). The study is based on literature, questionnaires, interviews and personal participation of over two years each week in the Berkeley and Los Angeles temples. Through literature, Judah is able to present a masterly overview of the history, beliefs and theology of the movement. The questionnaires were used to reveal biographical information and attitudes of the devotees to obtain statistical profiles. Participant observation and interview material were used to describe the alternative life-style espoused by the devotees. But the main contribution of the study is Judah’s interpretation of the meaning of the conversion to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Judah argues that the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement is characterised by rejection of American secular culture and its established religions and incorporation of countercultural secular values (1974a, 106). By counterculture, Judah refers primarily to hippiedom, the group from which the majority of devotees were initially drawn. The hard-core hippies were people who left their homes to live an alternative communal life-style, including liberated sexuality, drug use and a disregard for law and authority. Their values were expressed in slogans that typically included “love”, “peace” and “freedom”. The polarisation has sometimes been expressed in terms of “far right”, which is characterised as authoritarian, puritanical, punitive and fundamentalist, and the “new left”, characterised by equalitari-

anism, radical democracy, social justice and social commitment (Judah 1974a, 104).

According to Judah's study, the devotees have rejected the following elements of the establishment: the aims of material success, conventional education, accumulation of possessions, authority of the status quo, war (especially that in Vietnam) and hypocrisy of those belonging to the establishment (1974a, 16; 112-137). Judah sees the Hare Kṛṣṇa ideology as a continuation of the accepted countercultural values now arranged into a religious context. He states that the Hare Kṛṣṇa philosophy "not only supports a countercultural way of life acceptable to the devotee, but the Society makes it possible for him to follow it" (1974a, 158). In other words, according to this interpretation, the movement is a vehicle of countercultural protest for the American youth (1974a, 12).

The approach that links the movement with countercultural protest has been very influential. Finnish scholar of religion Martti Junnonaho's (1996) research on Divine Light Mission (DLM), Transcendental Meditation (TM) and ISKCON in the Finnish context is based on a broadly similar approach. However, Junnonaho's study is exceptional in that it includes a phenomenological comparison of three movements of Indian background. The material for Junnonaho's research was also collected over an extended period of time, beginning in the early 70's in the case of DLM and continuing to the early 90's in the case of ISKCON.

The second early study of ISKCON is Francine Daner's ethnography (1976). Her approach can be described as encyclopaedic in that she attempts to describe the entire life-style of the ISKCON devotee, including descriptions of history of the movement, beliefs, ritual life, social institutions and individual biographies of some devotees. She collected her material through participant observation from March 1971 to June 1974 in Boston, New York, London and Amsterdam.

Daner approaches the subject from the point of view of religious cults or 'revitalisation movements' (Wallace 1956). She also sees the movement as exemplifying the contemporary faction of youth in search of "the nonintellectual, the irrational, and the mystical" and its "expression of disgust with society and with the values of the parent generation" (1976, 2). With the help of Erving Goffman's and Erik H. Erikson's theories, Daner proposes that identity problems and alienation were key factors in the lives of the devotees, which she attempts to describe with biographical data on the devotees and detailed description of temple life. Daner argues that ISKCON temples afford a total-institutional setting that provides a well-defined identity for its members.

One of the major ethnographies of the movement is that of sociologist E. Burke Rochford, Jr. (1985). Rochford's study relies mostly on participant observation conducted in 1975 – 1981 in the Los Angeles temple. Rochford also used a non-random survey of six ISKCON communities in the United States. A third method was systematic observation of street solicitation.

Rochford's study focuses on the growth and development of the movement in America. The study is exceptional in that it incorporates a diachronic aspect of the movement during a crucial period of change. In 1975, the movement was at its peak in terms of membership and economic prosperity. Then, in 1977, when the founder of the movement died, recruitment dwindled, members started to defect and financial resources diminished. Rochford discusses at length the proselytisation, solicitation, recruitment and membership processes from the sociological viewpoint. He looks at the process both from inside the movement and from adaptation to the surrounding society. Thus, Rochford's study provides a detailed sociological picture of the institutional development of the movement within American society.

Very similar in approach is Ronny Sjöblom's study of the history and development of Swedish ISKCON (1988; 1990). Sjöblom's interest lies in the internal conflict within the movement in Sweden. He also ties the approach to the problems of succession after the death of the founder guru. Information on the Northern European situation can also be found in Koskikallio (1984), Frisk (1993; 1998) and Rothstein (1997).

In most of the above studies, the key issue often lies in the recruitment, conversion and membership processes. Larry D. Shinn (1987) approaches the subject from the perspective of a scholar of religion. The research takes as its starting point the social response to alternative religions. Shinn takes issue with the "cult" stereotypes prevalent in the media and popular literature, and perceptively analyses the religious ideas behind the movement. Shinn's work is based on a large amount of interview material and participant observation in fourteen temples in United States and two in India beginning in 1980.

The vast majority of studies on ISKCON have focused on the Western societies, treating the movement very much in terms of the scene of new religious movements, alternative life styles and conversion. Bromley and Shinn's (1989) edited volume *Krishna Consciousness in the West* is an excellent collection of articles on many of the above-mentioned themes (see also Judah 1974b; Daner 1975; Johnson 1976; Knott 1986; Rochford 1989; Weiss & Mendoza 1990). A notable exception in this regard is anthropologist Charles R. Brooks' (1989) study of ISKCON in the Indian pilgrimage town of Vṛndāvana, where the movement has established a major temple. Brooks is intrigued by the fact that traditionally foreigners have been excluded from the Hindu religion. According to traditional views, it would have been impossible for Westerners to become *brāhmaṇas*. So the very presence of Western devotees and their management of the ISKCON temple in Vṛndāvana creates an interesting social situation that Brooks' study aims to describe and analyse.

As in the previous studies, Brooks' main data collection method is participant observation. The theoretical perspective is derived from the symbolic interactionism of Herbert Blumer. This methodological approach concentrates on the processual aspects of social life, attempting to capture objects, symbols and

strategies developed over time in meaningful situations. Thus, the study focuses on questions related to the setting, situations, actors and meanings constructed in the devotees' interactions with the indigenous population. In this way, Brooks is able to present a very rich and detailed ethnography of the movement in a particular Indian town.

Almost every study introduced so far relies on ethnographic field work methods: interviews, participant observation and surveys. This reflects that most of the studies were conducted by sociologists and anthropologists. Scholars of religion, with their characteristically more textual approaches, have not figured equally prominently in the field. There is one notable exception, namely Rothstein's (1996) comparative study of the TM movement and ISKCON, that focuses on the relation between religion and science in these movements. Most of the studies also identify major causal influences behind the movement processes in the contemporary Western social context — so much so that the movement is often characterised as an entirely Western phenomenon.

The career of Prabhupāda, or of ISKCON more generally, can, however, be seen from a broader perspective. Certainly the 60's counterculture was a significant factor in the early development of ISKCON, yet seeing it entirely as its product may be misleading. Similar religious figures of mass appeal have been found the world over. There are also some reasons to doubt whether the ideological message of the movement was the primary attraction.

### **1.3 Subject of study**

Founders and reformers of religions like Prabhupāda are very often described as possessing a mysterious aura of personality called 'charisma'. In fact, the term has been included in the standard jargon of social sciences, where it denotes a particular kind of social authority; one that is based on personal qualities and capacities rather than institutionally granted rights and privileges (cf. Eisenstadt 1968). More specifically, it usually denotes an authority that rests on some type of religious or supernatural beliefs regarding the person in question.

Prabhupāda did not represent a pure charismatic leadership. He rested his authority very much on his being properly initiated into the tradition of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. He regarded himself as a missionary of a venerable tradition and not a founder of a new religion. He did not base his authority in any novel personal revelations. He also regarded the sacred scripture as more authoritative than any personal revelation that might contradict the scripture.

Yet in the eyes of his Western followers, Prabhupāda did not gain legitimacy so much on the basis of tradition, but on the basis of his personal qualities. The new cultural context turned him into a charismatic leader, whose authority rested almost completely on his personal realisation and character. Whatever Prabhupāda said was the truth and that was all there was to it. In the Western

context, his teachings were also radically novel. He was not even a typical Hindu guru since he rejected the monistic Advaita Vedānta taught by most of them. In this sense, and in this context, Prabhupāda was a charismatic leader without question.

It is of considerable import to social scientific theory to have a proper description of how a Hindu guru came to be seen as charismatic in the eyes of his Western followers. The dominant sociological and anthropological theories of charisma would locate the origin of charismatic perceptions in the needs, aspirations and expectations prevalent in the societies of the followers. As we saw in the previous review of studies, the cause of Prabhupāda's success has been supposed to lie primarily in the American and European social context of the 60's. I shall attempt to show that this interpretation is not entirely satisfactory, and that we need to look to other sources for perceptions of charisma.

Behind this question of charismatic appeal lies a deeper issue of the acquisition and transmission of religious ideas in general. Once we cease seeing the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement merely in terms of the problematics of Western societies, a host of questions emerges regarding how religious ideas become transmitted across cultural and geographical boundaries. How were the alien ideas acquired in this case? What were the mechanisms of transmission of religion from one society to another? How did the Western followers actually represent the originally Indian cultural idea of a guru, or religious preceptor and guide? In what kinds of contexts did they learn or acquire these representations, and how were these ideas used in practical problem solving?

These questions emphasise the need to describe and analyse the guru-disciple interaction in early ISKCON in much more detail. The aim of this study was to describe the interactions of Prabhupāda and his disciples in such a way that insight into the nature of the charismatic representations can be gained. To my knowledge, this has not been attempted before. Furthermore, it is of considerable interest with regard to charismatic phenomena to describe the situations of interaction in such a way that one can analyse the cognitions of the participants involved. To get a reliable hold on the cognitive side of past events requires careful attention to the materials and methods involved.

#### **1.4 Materials and methods**

In an important sense, this research is a continuation of the previous studies described above. As in most of these studies, my general approach is ethnographic. But some crucial differences also exist, the type of ethnography used here may appear somewhat atypical in that it is based mainly on written sources. For this reason, I will briefly reflect a on the nature and purpose of ethnography and how it is utilised in the present work.

#### 1.4.1 ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

The concept of 'ethnography' has been understood in several different ways. Most often it is more or less equated with a research method in which the researcher participates in people's daily lives for an extended period of time. In this sense, ethnography becomes synonymous with a method of data gathering called 'participant observation' (Agar 1980, 114; Hammersley & Atkinson 1983, 2). Sometimes the concept of ethnography is used in opposition to historical description or theory. It can also be used to describe an academic discipline. (See Ellen 1984, 7.)


In my opinion, all these characterisations are far too narrow. Here I will use the term in its substantive sense, namely, to refer to empirical accounts of the culture and social organisation of particular human populations (Ellen 1984, 7). In studying cultures, one must take account of what people do, what they know and what things they make and use (Spradley 1980, 5). In other words, the task of ethnography is to describe a culture by focusing on people's behaviour, knowledge and artefacts; the particular methods the ethnographer employs are of secondary importance. They may include fieldwork, but they may also include analysis of written materials and archaeological records. Historical description of an ancient culture can be done from an ethnographic point of view, as, for example, when one describes the way of life in a medieval village. Similarly, the description of a contemporary culture may base the analysis on written documents. It all depends on what questions the ethnographer asks and finding the most suitable format to answer these questions.

Used in this way, the concept also enables one to distinguish among different kinds of ethnographies. Ethnography can be approached from different points of view and used on several different levels. Anthropologist James P. Spradley (1980) has distinguished ethnographic subject matters according to the *scope* of the investigation. At one end of the continuum, the ethnographer(s) can take the whole complex society with its numerous communities and national institutions as a unit of study. At the opposite end of the continuum, one finds studies on a single social situation. In the former case, we can talk about "macro-ethnography", and in the latter, "micro-ethnography". In between these poles, there are the institutional and community levels. (See Table 1.)

Approaches to ethnography can also be distinguished in terms of the nature of the *problem* the researcher attempts to solve. The main purpose of some ethnographies is to document a way of life for its intrinsic interest. These can be described as *self-contained* or *encyclopaedic* ethnographies, typically describing a wide range of customs and social institutions. In an extreme case, an ethnography of this type is nothing more than an inventory of different cultural practices with no interest in more general questions. More usually, however, studies in this category examine the different aspects of culture with regard to each other. In contrast, other studies focus on a way of life or certain aspects of it for broader comparative or theoretical purposes. These are known as *theoretically informed* eth-

nographies. One can, for example, approach certain rituals or forms of economic exchange from the point of view of a larger body or theory dealing with these issues. The early French sociology of religion of Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss was clearly of this kind. (Cf. Clammer 1984; see also Spradley 1980, 31.) This methodological and scientific (as opposed to national romantic) orientation is also characteristic of the early Finnish fieldwork tradition of Northern ethnography, founded among others by M. A. Castrén (1813-1852) (Pentikäinen, in press).

Table 1 *Variations in research scope*

SCOPE OF RESEARCH	SOCIAL UNITS STUDIED
<div style="text-align: center;">           Macro-ethnography              Micro-ethnography         </div>	A complex society
	Multiple communities
	A single community study
	Multiple social institutions
	A single social institution
	Multiple social situations
	A single social situation

(Source: Spradley 1980, 30)

Looked at from these perspectives, this study can be characterised as a theoretically informed ethnography of a limited scope. My intention is not to provide a comprehensive ethnography of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement, but to focus on a particular class of social situations, namely, the forms of guru-disciple interaction. As is clear from the previous account, there are already many excellent ethnographies of the movement with the aim providing more or less holistic analyses of the entire Hare Kṛṣṇa way of life (see above). My questions and approaches arise from the definite theoretical viewpoint of the cognitive study of religious representations (see Section 3). As far as I know, no comparable studies have previously been done.



### 1.4.2 CLASSIFICATION OF MATERIALS

As we saw previously, most of the studies on the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement have relied primarily on the classical fieldwork techniques of participant observation and interview. However, materials gathered in this way may lead to a slightly distorted view of this particular movement. Participant observation as a method is valuable in studies of oral cultures, whether of non-literate societies studied by anthropologists or street cultures (hobos, prostitutes, drug-users) studied by the Chicago school sociologists. However, the Hare Kṛṣṇa culture belongs to neither of these categories. In fact, the movement is extremely focused and dependent on written texts. First and foremost, the movement places a pronounced emphasis on Indian sacred literature and authoritative commentaries on these by the movement founder, which are studied daily in the temples. Secondly, much of the management of the international society is achieved through written correspondence. Thirdly, the lectures, interviews and even casual conversations of Prabhupāda have all been carefully recorded, transcribed, archived and studied by the devotees internationally. Fourthly, writing books and articles has been strongly encouraged within the movement, so much so that nowadays most of the prominent disciples of Prabhupāda have written and published numerous books, essays and articles.

Table 2 *Categories of written sources*

- 
1. Prabhupāda's own works
    - translations and commentaries of sacred scripture
    - other books
    - recorded and transcribed lectures
    - recorded and transcribed conversations and interviews
    - letters
  2. Historical works
    - official biography of Prabhupāda
    - other historical works
  3. Autobiographies of disciples
  4. Published diaries of disciples
  5. Miscellaneous works
- 

The mass of literature that is used in the movement today is enormous. It contains very heterogeneous material that can be divided into the following source categories (see Table 2). The most authoritative doctrinal sources are Prabhupāda's voluminous theological writings. His translation and commentary

of *Bhagavad-gītā* comprises 904 pages in the English language edition. The translated and commented version of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* takes up 18 volumes of about one thousand pages each. The 16<sup>th</sup> century Bengali language biography of Caitanya by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*), also translated and commented on by Prabhupāda, consists of nine volumes. In addition to translations and commentaries of these and other sacred literature, Prabhupāda has also published some 40 books written by himself.

The unedited transcripts of Prabhupāda's conversations and interviews have been published in 37 volumes of 400 pages each. His lectures on *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and other topics have been published in 25 volumes of 700 pages each. Edited versions of Prabhupāda's letters to his disciples have been published in three volumes of 2600 pages each. Most of the lectures, conversations and songs are also available in audio cassettes. The complete set includes a total of 1120 tapes. Live footage of Prabhupāda is available in 20 videotapes.

The second important category consists of historical works written by Prabhupāda's disciples. Their literary production is no less impressive: at the time of writing, over 30 historical, biographical and autobiographical works centring on Prabhupāda exist. Foremost among the historical texts is the official biography of Prabhupāda by Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami, *Śrīla Prabhupāda-Līlāmṛta* (1993a-f). This carefully researched and well-written document consists of six volumes of about 300 pages each. In addition to this monumental achievement, a number of other historical works focusing on more limited aspects of Prabhupāda's life are available. Hayagrīva dāsa's book *The Hare Krishna Explosion: The Birth of Krishna Consciousness in America (1966 – 1969)* is a vivid personal account of the early stages of the movement based on personal notebooks, diaries and memories of one of the first disciples of Prabhupāda. Kūrma dāsa's book *The Great Transcendental Adventure* (1999) describes Prabhupāda's activities in Australia and New Zealand during his six visits there in 1971 - 1976. This book is based on 950 hours of recorded interviews with 180 disciples and well-wishers of the movement, together with other historical documents. Vedavyāsa dāsa's book *Śrīla Prabhupāda in Germany* (1996) is based on interviews of about 35 devotees, along with letters, lectures and historical documents, and it describes the beginnings of Prabhupāda's European and especially German mission in a very readable narrative. Historical works of similar format also include Janānanda dāsa's *Prabhupāda in Malaysia* (1996) and Riddha dāsa's *Destination South Africa* (1997).

The third important category of documents is composed of autobiographical writings of Prabhupāda's disciples. These works can be characterised as topical autobiographies; they focus on the narrator's life in so far as it concerns the relationship with Prabhupāda. Some of these works deal with the entire period of time the author had the opportunity to interact with Prabhupāda personally, while others centre on a more limited period. Bhūrijana dāsa's autobiography

(1996) covers the period from 1968 when he joined the movement until Prabhupāda's death in 1977. Tamal Krishna Goswami's autobiography (1984) begins at the time of his joining the movement in 1968 until Christmas 1975. Māhāmāyā devī-dāsī's memoir (2000) describes how she joined the movement in 1971 and her subsequent adventures as a member until Prabhupāda's death.

Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami has published a number of autobiographical works of more limited scope. His memoir *With Śrīla Prabhupāda in the Early Days* (1991) covers the early years of 1966 – 1969, his book *Life With the Perfect Master* (1983) describes the seven-month period he worked as a Prabhupāda's personal servant in 1974. Bali Mardan dāsa's book *Journey to the Pacific Rim* (1996) covers the period of 1969 – 1971, describing the author's missionary journeys in Malaysia, Fiji, Japan, and Australia. Howard Wheeler's (Hayagrīva Swami) *Vrindaban Days* (1990) is a travel journal based on a trip to India in October – November 1972. In addition to these books, I have also made use of some shorter writings (Mukunda 1977; Bhakti Vikāśa Swami 1997; Dhruvanath 1997).

The fourth major source category is composed of published diaries of Prabhupāda's disciples. Although there are only two works in this category, they have such extraordinary characteristics that they deserve to be categorised separately. The first of these is Hari Śauri dāsa's *A Transcendental Diary*, which is an expanded form of a personal written diary kept over a period of sixteen months, from November 1975 to March 1977, when he accompanied Prabhupāda as a personal servant. The original diary has been extended by using the recorded material of Prabhupāda's conversations and his correspondence. The special characteristics of this work may be appreciated if one considers that the diary covers a period of merely sixteen months but fills four volumes of 500 – 600 pages each. Furthermore, Hari Śauri dāsa has written a rather straightforward presentation of events without much commentary on their meaning or significance. The result is a simple, factual account of times, places and events that show how Prabhupāda interacted with his disciples. As the sociologist E. Burke Rochford, Jr. states in the foreword to this work: "For scholars and students of religion the material presented represents a critically important historical record. Anyone seeking to understand Prabhupāda's movement specifically, or the centrality of charismatic leadership to the development of religious movements, will want to consider this book." (Rochford 1992, xv.) I agree wholeheartedly.

If this were not enough of a rare jewel, there is another work of equal import. Prabhupāda's personal secretary and servant, Tamal Krishna Goswami, continued to keep a diary from February 1977 until Prabhupāda's demise in November. This diary was subsequently published in 1998. Again, what is significant is that, first, the diarist does not reflect much upon his own feelings and reactions and, second, that the diary is presented virtually as it was, with only minimal editing. The result is best described in the foreword by Ravindra Svarūpa dāsa:

It [the diary] has eluded, fortuitously, the kind of cosmetic retouchings or air-brushings that piety reflexively bestows upon the representations of those it reveres. The writer's devotion notwithstanding, this is no "hagiography" of an unreal "plaster saint" idealised beyond human recognition. The diarist witnessed Prabhupāda from up-close during a time of extreme crisis and recorded what he saw in unflinching concrete detail. (1998, x.)

There is a fifth category of miscellaneous works that I have used as sources. These include a collection of anecdotes told by Prabhupāda's disciples and compiled by Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami (1996), lectures on the significance of Prabhupāda's death by the same author (1979a) and various other philosophical and devotional writings of the devotees.

With the exception of Rothstein's study, very little of this material has been analysed. This is one of the reasons why I decided to take the literary documents produced in the movement as my key source. A second reason is that Prabhupāda's collected works are now available in the very research-friendly form of a computer database (Bhaktivedanta VedaBase 1999).

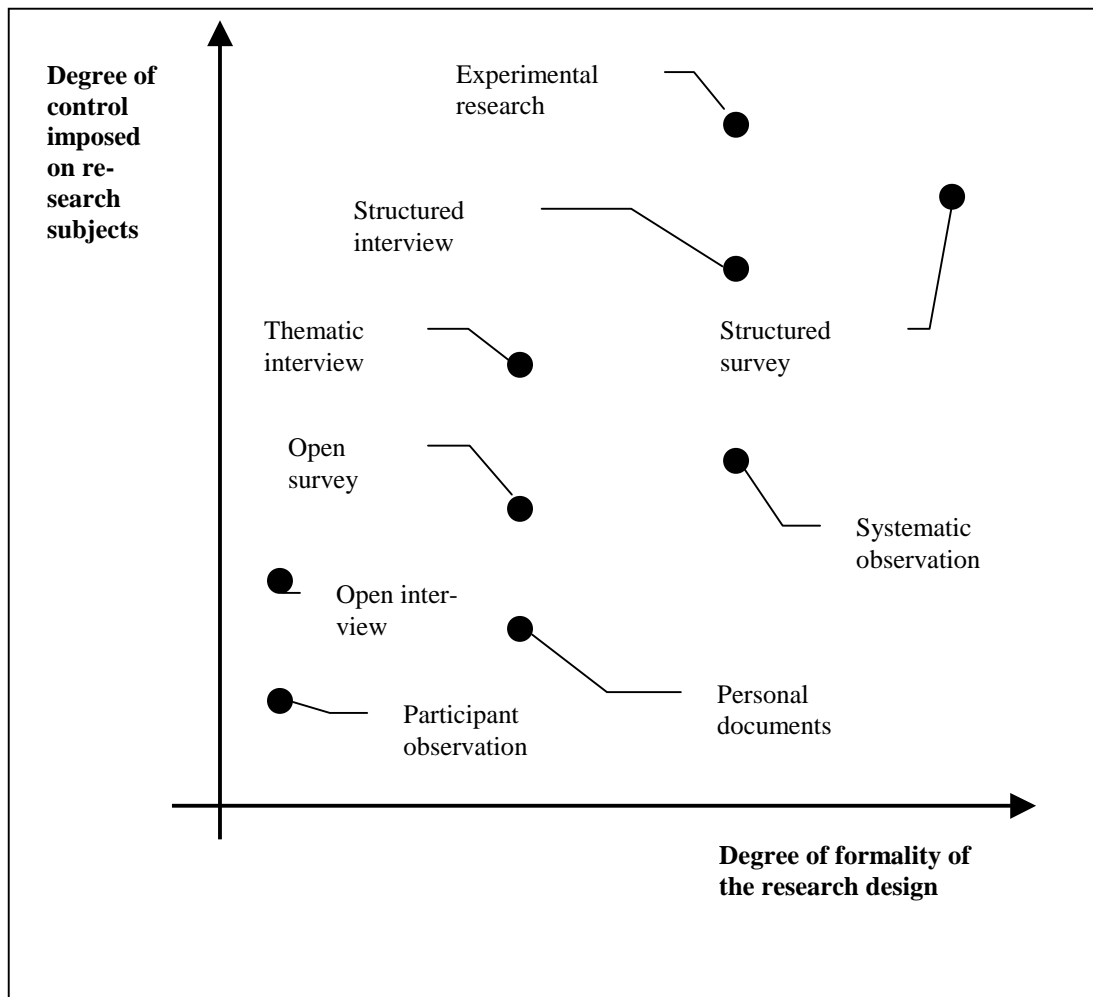
The most important reason for the choice of source material is, however, that these documents provide access to social situations that are no longer directly observable, namely the close interactions of a charismatic leader with his disciples during all phases of his career. The only alternative way to study this issue would have been to locate some of Prabhupāda's disciples myself and conduct interviews. One advantage of this method would have been to enable me to focus more directly on issues of special interest to my research. As it is now, the material consists of large amounts of data that are not directly relevant to my questions. Nevertheless, it does provide a very rich, detailed picture of Prabhupāda and his disciples. Secondly, the interview method would have enabled me to select different kinds of informants. As it stands, all the writers are devotees: no disillusioned ex-devotees or casual acquaintances tell their stories. However, this is not necessarily a problem since the aim of the study was not to get an historically accurate account of Prabhupāda himself, but an impression of the Hare Kṛṣṇa culture. In the end, I considered the advantages of the interview methods to be outweighed by the disadvantage of their being time-consuming.

Although the main sources of this study are written documents, I also employed fieldwork techniques as auxiliary methods. I used participant observation for two purposes: first, it enabled me to generally familiarise myself with the life-style and ethos of the movement, which in turn helped me to see the nature and value of the written sources in their proper context. Second, participant observation allowed me to describe the ritual life of the movement, which would have been impossible through written sources alone. For these purposes, I visited the temple in Helsinki regularly (once a month, on average) from fall 1997 to fall 2000 (see Field diary 1 & 4; Notebook 1-6). During this time I took part in daily worship, lectures, calendrical rites (yearly festivals) and rites of passage (initia-

tions, weddings). I also participated in festivals and seminars organised by the movement. The seminars included a week-long seminar in Radhadesh, Belgium, in June-July 1998; two weeks in Mayapur, India, in February – March 1999 during the Gaura Pūrṇimā Festival; and one week in Vṛndāvana in March 1999 (see Field diary 2-3). During these festivalseminars I lived in the ISKCON communities, following the typical life-style of devotees — excluding, however, the dress and hairstyle codes. I recorded my observations during these periods with the help of field diaries, photographs and videotaped recordings (see e.g. Diwali 1997; 1999; India Experience 2000; Initiations 2000; Janmashtami 2000; Narasimha 2000; Wedding 2000).

I also interviewed nineteen members and three former members of the movement. The purpose of these interviews was ethnographic. In other words, the interviews were conducted on a variety of issues in an attempt to seek knowledge not otherwise available.

Fig. 1 *Different methods of acquiring data and the position of research subjects*



(Source: Modified from Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 1997, 190.)

Some special features exist in these kinds of materials. Different methods of acquiring data can be characterised along two different continua (see Fig. 1). On one hand, methods can be distinguished in terms of the degree of control they impose on research subjects. On the other hand, they can be distinguished in terms of the formality and rigour they place on research design. Experimental research, for example, is high with regard to control imposed on subjects, and it also allows rather rigorous hypothetical-deductive research-designs. The lowest degree of control imposed on research subjects is in participant observation and personal documents, that is, precisely the methods used in this study. This feature can be turned into an advantage of a special kind: unobtrusive methods provide what is called ‘naturally occurring data’. They provide natural subjective accounts of people’s cultural world (Plummer 1983, 2; Burgess 1984, 123). Unsolicited personal documents give exceptionally good access to the way people themselves organise their experience through cultural categories and mental models. Researcher interference in the presentation of the material is minimal.

Of course, formality of the research design is also low in these methods. The logic of the research naturally falls on the more inductive side, rather than the deductive one of experimental and survey research. Human documents are poor candidates for hypothesis testing, whereas they are excellent for the grounded theory approach of qualitative research (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

#### 1.4.3 THE LOGIC OF QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Qualitative analysis differs in many respects from quantitative research. Quantitative analysis is based on finding statistical regularities in the way different variables are related to each other. This leads to an attempt to increase the observation units so that the statistical regularities become significant. Statistical argumentation allows exceptions, it does not matter whether the correlation between variables holds in every single case. This, however, is not true in qualitative analysis. Qualitative analysis is based on a certain kind of “absoluteness” (Alasuutari 1995) that is a natural consequence of the inductive logic of qualitative research. One attempts to find rules and generalisations that hold throughout the material being analysed. They are produced by combining several raw observations to form higher-level observations. In this type of analysis, one seeks to formulate a rule which applies without exception to all data, if looked at from a particular point of view. As stated by sociologist Pertti Alasuutari: “in qualitative analysis a single exception is enough to break the rule, to show that one has to rethink the whole thing” (1995, 14).

Alasuutari (1995, 13-18) distinguishes between two different phases of qualitative analysis: 1) *purification of observations* and 2) *unriddling*. Purification of observations is achieved, first, by looking at the material from a particular theoretical point of view. The theoretical framework and questions asked delimit the possible observations to a great extent. Second, the amount of data is reduced

by combining observations. In other words, attempts to identify common denominators in the material are made by classifying the observations in thematically coherent sets. One tries to find specimens of the same phenomenon and group them together. The characteristic result of this activity is some kind of typology, abstract structure or set of rules.

Unriddling means that one tries to give an interpretation or explanation of the findings obtained through the purification phase. Once the researcher has found interesting regularities in the data through applying a particular point of view and asking specific questions, a satisfactory account for the findings must be provided. In this phase, different clues may be used to solve the mystery. Previous research on similar subject matters, statistical findings, and more general theories may be recruited for this purpose. The regularities one has identified can be shown to exemplify a pattern that has been found in other studies on a similar topic. Thus, the explanation for the regularities requires that one look at the material from an even higher level of abstraction.

#### 1.4.4 APPROACHES TO WRITTEN MATERIALS

The theoretical concepts and viewpoint are provided by cognitive theories of communication and religious representations. These theoretical fields are introduced in subsequent sections more fully. There are, however, some important methodological choices which result from the cognitive approach that need to be discussed here.

Psychologist Derek Edwards (1997, 267) warns of special dangers in using autobiographies as sources. This danger can be illustrated by using Hayden White's (1973) distinction between a *chronicle*, a sequential record of events, and a *history*, events that are linked together into an explanatory narrative. According to this distinction, diaries are closer to chronicles, whereas autobiographies are generally closer to histories. Autobiographies are self-reflective accounts telling of trials, tribulations and accomplishments of a career. Autobiographies attempt to create coherence out of the events. They also contain moral evaluations, personal reflections and value judgements on the events described. To some extent, they are also a culturally and historically located textual genre. The conclusion reached by Edwards is:

[W]e have no business, as analysts, reading *through* them to the life beyond, any more than we can read through discourse of any kind, to recover the world it purports to represent. Rather, they have to be read reflexively, in the ethnomethodological sense, as part of, as moves in, and as constituting the lives they are ostensibly "about". (1997, 271.)

Edwards makes a useful distinction between different kinds of objects at which the analysis of narratives might be aimed:

- 1) the nature of the *events* narrated;
- 2) people's perception or *understanding* of events; and
- 3) the *discourse* of such understandings and events (ibid.).

In other words, there are three separate types of analysis of narrative texts: the first sees the texts as pictures of events, the second sees them as pictures of mind and the third sees them as a form of social action.

The first type corresponds to the basic ethnographic approaches interested in capturing the situations, events and actions that once took place. In this approach, it becomes crucial to analyse the texts in terms of truthfulness and honesty, lies and errors. This is the approach that Edwards warns us not to take towards autobiographical material.

The second type, focusing on the minds of the narrators instead of the events described by them, corresponds to approaches in cognitive anthropology, cognitive psychology and narrative psychology. The texts are treated as evidence of how individuals, groups or cultures see things, thus providing access to their cognition, culture and knowledge.

The third approach focuses on texts as a performative domain of social action. This approach corresponds to much of conversation analysis, rhetorical analysis and discursive psychology. In these approaches, the basic assumption is that the nature of events and the nature of people's understandings are actually *at stake* in some social context. Therefore, the analysis seeks to uncover just how these things are worked up, managed, topicalised, implied, etc., to achieve certain social goals. (Edwards 1997, 272; see also Sjöblom 2000, 21-42.)

My approach here is mainly focused on the second type of analysis. In other words, I am primarily interested in how the narrators of the above-mentioned histories, autobiographies and diaries see Prabhupāda and his actions. In most cases, it matters little whether the events described actually took place exactly as told. What is more important is that certain kinds of events are in fact selected as a focus of a narrative and reflected upon by the narrators. I am neither trying to write a definitive accounts of the life of Prabhupāda himself, nor of his disciples. I am therefore not interested in the events themselves, or in the life courses of specific individuals. I am interested in the cognitive processes that reveal the way Prabhupāda and his actions were perceived and interpreted. Insofar as it has been necessary to describe the historical contexts and backgrounds of certain events, I have used the more reliable historical works and cross-checked these with other available evidence.

I am of course fully aware that all these texts have been produced in a certain historical context and for a specific audience — and thus, they are amenable to the third type of analysis. Generally speaking, these texts have been published in the late 1980's and 1990's. This is a period of intense self-scrutiny within the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. One of the reasons for this scrutiny has been the crisis of legitimacy and authority of the present leadership (Rochford 1989; 1999; Tamal



1997). These texts signal the occurrence of a definite increase of focus in the founder of the movement and his legacy. Therefore, it would have been fully appropriate to analyse the texts as discursive actions designed for particular social and political purposes within the movement. This, however, was not the purpose of this study.

The search for cognitive processes behind narratives raises important questions of methodology. The foremost of these has to do with the phenomenon of so-called ‘theological correctness’. This term has been coined by the psychologist Justin L. Barrett (1999) to denote two different levels of representation, one being more abstract and complex (“theological”) and the other more basic, concrete and simple. When religious knowledge is consciously reflected upon, the concepts tend to be more abstract, and closer to dominant theological dogma, whereas when religious knowledge is activated for the more mundane behaviour and rapid problem-solving, they tend to approach more fundamental, intuitive knowledge. In other words, the cognitive demands of the context determine to a great degree the nature of the religious concepts used. When taken as a focus in themselves, the concepts tend to be more theologically correct than when used in rapid generation of inferences.

The obvious implication of this distinction is that one needs to specify which level is being studied and to use data appropriate to that level (Barrett 1999, 335). According to Barrett, the theological level concepts can be studied through self-report, questionnaires, surveys and recorded discourse. Written theological treatises obviously provide material of this sort as well. The basic level concepts can be studied through situations in which they are in use, and not merely reflected upon. Written responses from individuals may well be used to measure basic level concepts as long as “what is being asked is not a direct reflection on what their concepts are” (*ibid.*, 336).

From this, it becomes obvious that unsolicited autobiographies and diaries are a mixed baggage in terms of theological correctness. On the one hand, they do include a great deal of material that is the result of conscious and explicit reflection on the theological import of events. On the other hand, they also include an enormous amount of material which describes the narrator in the act of doing something that requires the use of tacit religious concepts. These descriptions often include implicit use of concepts that can be described as basic level ones. It is the latter kinds of narratives that I have mainly focused upon in this research. However, it is the special nature of this kind of source material that it usually interweaves both levels into the descriptions and for this reason I have attempted to keep note in the analysis of the shifts in the levels that sometimes occur in the material.

## 1.5 Overview of contents

The argument of this study proceeds in an inductive fashion, building up general conclusions from the basis of a thorough analysis of sources. However, in order to grasp the specific point of view from which the analysis was done, one has to have some familiarity with certain concepts. For this reason, the first part of this study consists of introductions to certain theoretical concepts in sociological theory and in the cognitive sciences.

Section two makes an introductory survey of previous sociological and anthropological theories of charisma. The section begins by exploring the foundations of the concept of ‘charisma’ within the writings of Max Weber. Next, a quick survey of sociological theories of the origin of charisma are investigated and criticised. By going through this material, I intend to show where my approach is continuous and where it diverges from earlier approaches.

In section three, the major theoretical foundations of the cognitive study of communication and representation are introduced. First, I present the cognitive scientific approach in which this study is basically rooted. After this, I introduce various theories concerning the way in which human mental contents are organised. The concepts introduced lay the foundation for my analysis of Hare Kṛṣṇa materials.

The second part of this study is organised into five sections dealing with different dimensions of Prabhupāda’s charisma. Section four introduces the consciously held and explicit teachings of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. First, an overview of the whole theological structure is presented. This forms the main intellectual content that Prabhupāda taught his disciples. The main part of the section is, however, devoted to teachings concerning the guru-disciple relationship. Both theological and institutional conceptions are explored in depth.

Having understood what the movement is basically about, one can then move on to explore more tacit dimensions of various activities. Section five introduces the reader to the daily cycle of rituals in the movement. One can argue that a major part of Prabhupāda’s charisma was “constructed” or at least dependent on the obligatory ritual deference he was accorded. Various anthropologists and scholars of religion have postulated that the Indian ceremonial life includes deeply embedded cultural idioms, which one needs to understand in order to grasp the guru-disciple relationship. Therefore, we will delve more deeply into the symbolic significance of the Hare Kṛṣṇa rituals and determine how important they are in terms of Prabhupāda’s charisma.

Finally, in sections six through eight, I will present my own analysis of the origins and nature of Prabhupāda’s charisma. These sections introduce extensive material which shows how Prabhupāda’s disciples actually represented him in day-to-day interactions. Section six explores what may be called “reports of first encounters” with the strange swami and tries to extract certain typical features from them. Section seven examines more deeply the ways in which Prabhupāda

was seen by his disciples. It is here that the pan-human cognitive basis of the disciples' representations of Prabhupāda is explored. In section eight, I attempt to show how the disciples' representations of Prabhupāda help account for the characteristic puzzlement that arises among disciples in certain crisis situations.

The two concluding sections bring the various threads of argument together and discuss their import for various theoretical schemes within the field of cognitive science of religion. The findings are linked to the growing body of theory that has been developed to explain the acquisition, maintenance and transmission of religious representations.



# PART I

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES



## SECTION TWO

# The concept of ‘charisma’ — the legacy of Max Weber

Traditionally, persons who are believed to be endowed with religious “power”, have been discussed under the rubric of ‘charisma’. By critically examining some of the previous theories about charisma, I intend to show how the term ‘charisma’ is defined and applied, and what kinds of theories have been presented to explain the phenomenon of charismatic leadership. In this way, I hope to demonstrate how the cognitive approach will be able to enrich and sharpen our theoretical hold on the phenomenon.

### 2.1 Max Weber on charisma

In Weber’s work, one can find two slightly different approaches to phenomena he describes as ‘charismatic’. In *Religionssoziologie (The Sociology of Religion 1965 [1922])*, Weber approaches religion from the viewpoint of our understanding of causality. He points out that we tend to distinguish ‘magic’ from other activities from the vantage point provided by modern knowledge of causal processes. In other words, we tend to describe as magical those actions that presuppose a concept of causality that we now hold to be fallacious. But the person performing magic does not categorise his or her activities on the same basis. The performer of magic distinguishes events and actions on the basis of their greater or lesser *extraordinariness* (ibid., 2). Not every stone is capable of serving as a fetish and not every person can achieve extraordinary states of consciousness such as in possession. Weber points out that it is primarily these extraordinary powers that have been designated in various cultures by such terms as *mana*, *orenda*, *maga* and the like. These emic terms Weber then substitutes with the term ‘charisma’ (ibid.), which itself is derived from Christian emic vocabulary, meaning the ‘gift of grace’.

Weber points out that even in the most primitive forms of religion one can detect an idea “that certain beings are concealed ‘behind’ and responsible for the activity of the charismatically endowed *natural objects, artefacts, animals or persons*” (ibid., 3, my emphasis), which he terms as belief in spirits. ‘Spirit’, says Weber, “is neither soul, demon, nor god, but something indeterminate, material, yet invisible, non-personal and yet somehow endowed with volition” (ibid.). This spirit can be distinguished from its material vessel. It may, for example depart from the vessel, which causes the magic to fail.

Weber is most concerned with charisma in connection with persons. He does not dwell extensively on objects, artefacts or animals endowed with charisma. In *Religionssoziologie*, he discusses various kinds of religious specialists endowed with charisma. It is useful to take a look at the categorisation Weber develops.

First of all, there is the *magician*. The magician has cultivated a distinctive subjective condition that is essential for the mediation of charisma, namely, the state of ecstasy (ibid., 3). At the opposite end of the spectrum is the *priest*, who does not depend on personal charisma. Weber discusses at length how the role of the priest emerges out of purely magical practice. For priesthood to emerge, there has to be a regularly organised and permanent enterprise concerned with influencing gods, that is to say, a cult, whereas magical practice is individual and occasional. As opposed to magicians, priests are employees operating in the interests of some social group and are not self-employed. The priests also have a body of special knowledge, religious doctrine and vocational training as their tool of trade, whereas magicians operate by virtue of personal charisma. The crucial feature of priesthood is that they form a specialised social group in the service of cultic enterprise. (Ibid., 28-30.)

Between the extremes of magicians and priests lies a group of religious specialists which does depend on personal charisma, namely, the *prophets*. The prophet, like the magician is an individual bearer of charisma. But, in contrast to magicians, prophets claim revelatory knowledge concerning specific doctrines and commandments. Distinct from priests, who are also bearers of doctrines and specific norms, the prophet’s claim to authority is based on his or her personal gifts or charisma. The priests lay claim to authority by virtue of their service to the tradition. In practice, the establishment of the prophet’s authority is usually based on special ecstatic abilities or performances of magic. Prophets may practice divination, healing arts or personal counselling. They are generally not required to professionalise their religious functions. The prophet typically propagates ideas for their own sake and not for any economic compensation. (Ibid., 46-48.)

Weber distinguishes the category of prophet from three other categories of charismatic religious specialists: sacred legislators, teachers of ethics and mystagogues. A legislator is a personage who has been assigned the responsibility of codifying or reconstituting a law (ibid., 49). The teachers of ethics may gather dis-



ciples and counsel individuals on personal matters. The traditional concept of *guru* in Hindu sacred law is a typical expression of this category. The relationship of master and disciple may be held sacred and involves various degrees of reverence. However, the teacher of ethics transmits acquired, not personally revealed knowledge. The teacher of ethics does not teach on his own authority, but by commission. (Ibid., 52.)

The mystagogue is a religious specialist, who performs sacraments, that is, magical actions that contain the boons of salvation. Again, in some Indian sects, the guru may distribute salvation by virtue of being initiated in a special lineage of secret magical practices and having mastered them. The mystagogues are distinguished from prophets because ethical doctrine usually plays only a subordinate role, and they may make a living out of their practice, similar to priests. (Ibid., 54-55.)

In the category of the prophet, Weber distinguishes two different types: 1) an *ethical prophet* is conceived to be an instrument for the proclamation of God's will; 2) an *exemplary prophet*, on the other hand, demonstrates to others the way to religious salvation by setting an example. The former is exemplified by Muhammad and the latter by Buddha. In both cases, the prophetic revelation involves "a unified view of the world derived from a consciously integrated and meaningful attitude toward life" (ibid., 59).

In part 1 of the *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (translated as *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* 1964 [1925]), Weber approaches the phenomenon of charisma from a slightly different point of view, namely, from that of power, domination and authority. In Weber's terminology, authority is legitimate domination (*Herrschaft*). Domination, or 'imperative control', is defined as "the probability that a command with a specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons" (ibid., 152). All forms of domination include a certain degree of voluntary submission to those in power. The obedience may be motivated by material interests, affective ties or ideal motives. But for the continuity of the relation of power, these motivations are inadequate. In addition to these, every system includes a tendency to foster belief in its legitimacy. It is on this idea of the different bases of legitimacy that Weber builds his most celebrated typology of legitimate authority. According to Weber, there are three pure types of legitimate authority:

- 1) Legal authority, which is based on rational grounds, that is, on a belief in the legal patterns and normative rules under which those in authority issue commands.
- 2) Traditional authority, which is based on an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions under which those in authority issue commands.
- 3) Charismatic authority, which is based on the exemplary character, sanctity and heroism of an individual person, who is issuing commands. (Ibid., 324-328.)

It is in this connection that Weber gives his most quoted definition of charisma:

The term 'charisma' will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader. (Ibid., 358-359.)

Weber lists as examples of such authority the prophets, individuals with therapeutic or legal wisdom, leaders in hunt and war heroes. The term also includes shamans and certain kinds of intellectuals. (Ibid., 359.)

From this concept, Weber then goes on to develop an ideal typical construction of charismatic authority, which includes the following key points:

- 1) The validity of charisma depends upon recognition on the part of those subject to authority;
- 2) If the signs and proofs of the existence of charisma fail too long, the leader loses his or her authority;
- 3) The followers of a charismatic leader form an emotional communal relationship in which decisions are made case by case without the aid of rules or officials;
- 4) Pure charisma resists economic considerations;
- 5) Charisma is a revolutionary force. (Ibid., 359-363.)

What I want to emphasise here is the subtle but noticeable shift of meaning between these two works of Weber. In his treatment of the sociology of religion, the notion of 'charisma' can simply be translated as a conception of religious or magical power associated with certain objects, animals or persons. In the second work, dealing with social and economic organisation, the emphasis shifts to persons, who are treated as leaders. In the former work, the magicians and mystagogues are included as charismatically endowed because they can work magic. In the second context, they are no longer included because they are seldom treated as leaders in emotionally bonded communities. Moreover, the conception loosens in the second work: it is not only a question of supernatural or superhuman powers and qualities, but also of 'exemplary' ones, which makes it easier to include non-religious leaders, such as military heroes and intellectuals, in the lot (see Fig. 2).

Despite the fact that it is precisely the second formulation that has received an enormous amount of attention among sociologists, I am more comfortable with the first one, in which the issue of authority is not embedded. That is to say, at the heart of the notion of 'charisma', there are simply religious representations concerning extraordinary or extra-natural forces and entities that are associated

with natural objects, artefacts, plants, animals and humans. In the case of charismatic authority, we are dealing with a special sub-category concerning humans who are associated with religious representations, and for this reason, treated in special ways. It is worth noting, however, that a magician's authority may be quite limited in its scope. He may be treated as simply providing services to a client for an agreed price. The magicians, sorcerers and witches — while certainly endowed with charisma in this sense — may actually be quite marginalised with regard to authority.

Here it is useful to consider Bernard de Jouvenel's treatment of authority. He has distinguished three dimensions of power and authority:

- 1) Extensiveness: how many people are subject to the commands;
- 2) Comprehensiveness: how many different kinds of actions may be influenced;
- 3) Intensiveness: how great sacrifices to their self-interests are the subjects ready to make in order to comply (i.e. moral integrity, risks to personal safety, etc.). (de Jouvenel 1958, 160.)

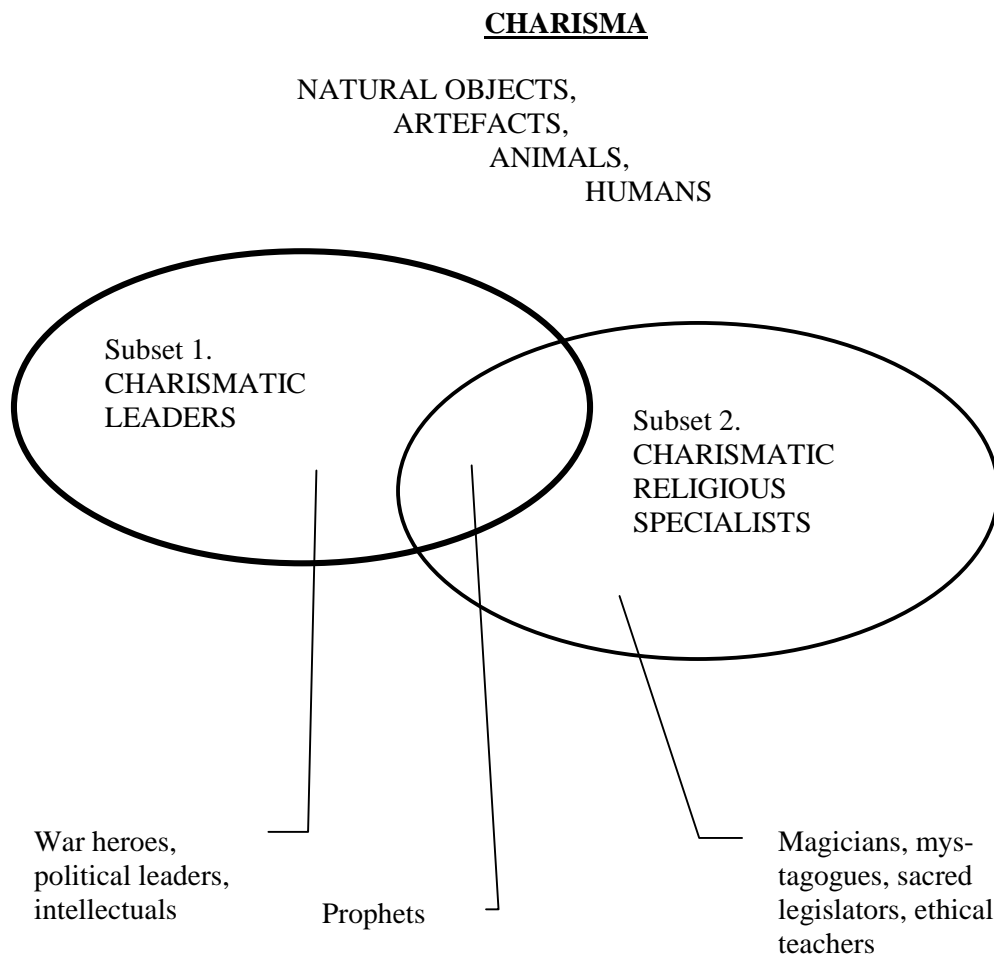
Now if we look at Weber's treatment of charismatic authority, we can readily see that what he has in mind is an extreme case, where the authority of the leader is simultaneously extensive, comprehensive and intensive. That is to say, a situation where there are large numbers of people following a single person's orders. Secondly, Weber clearly indicates that the charismatic leader is able to influence all aspects of the followers' lives. Thirdly, although this is not very explicit in Weber's treatment, it is usually assumed that the followers of the charismatic leader are willing to do virtually anything for him or her. But surely we can question whether these kinds of extreme phenomena are, in fact, necessarily entailed by charisma or merely an exception. I would assume that this picture is a negative stereotype reflecting a specifically modern mentality.

We can readily appreciate this if we consider the types of charismatic persons Weber considers in his *Religionssoziologie*. As noted above, there he considers such persons as magicians, sacred legislators, ethical teachers and mystagogues alongside the prophets. The magician is a charismatically endowed person. Still, we can see that extensiveness, comprehensiveness and intensity of the magician's power may be extremely limited. A magician generally serves one client at a time and then only occasionally. The relationship may be contractual and based on the client's needs. In other words, the comprehensiveness of the magician's power is limited. The magician may request that the client perform certain rites in order to achieve desired ends. The client may or may not perform these acts; it is up to his or her discretion, which means that the intensity of the magician's power is very low.

The categories of the 'ethical teachers' and 'mystagogues' are especially significant here. As Talcott Parsons has noted, Weber cites the Hindu guru as a pre-

eminent example of a religious teacher, who implements an established order rather than breaking with it (1965 [1922], xxxv). As we saw previously, Weber's conception of 'prophesy' implies that it is a revolutionary force. But both types of Hindu gurus, whether of the ethical teacher or mystagogue, are considered charismatically endowed upholders of the social order.

Fig. 2 *Max Weber's conception of charisma*



Significantly, it is only today, when India has turned into a secular state, that the charismatic gurus may be conceived to be in tension with society. But, and this is significant in relation to this study, the guru as an upholder of society, turns into a prophet proper when he steps outside India. For a Westerner, a charismatic Hindu guru is almost necessarily a prophet, who proclaims a radically new vision of reality.

To sum up, it seems that the category of the 'prophet' is one extreme in a continuum of power exerted by charismatically endowed persons. At the other extreme is the magician, with the lowest degree of authority. In the middle lie the typical categories of Hindu gurus, the teachers of ethics and mystagogues, whose

authority may vary markedly. Some gurus have thousands of followers; some have barely a handful. Some gurus proclaim a comprehensive doctrine that forms a complete way of life for followers; some gurus only provide personal counselling in the limited area of spiritual practice. Some gurus expect total surrender from their disciples, and others exhort their disciples to be self-reliant and independent. My point is simply that being charismatically endowed in no way determines the degree of power that the person has on another. The nature of the authority relationship can be analysed totally separately from the issue of charisma.

## **2.2 Theories of the origin of charisma**

So now that we have sorted out some of the conceptual difficulties, we can go further and ask for an explanation of charisma. What is the origin of charisma? How can we explain that some persons are treated as charismatically endowed? On what does the perception and recognition of charisma depend?

The first issue to be noted is that the answers depend very much on which one of Weber's concepts we have in mind. In the more broader sense described above, including non-human forms of charisma, the questions are co-extensive with the problem of religion as such. As a matter of fact, all subsequent commentators of Weber's concept have approached the problem in a more limited sense, i.e. have explained the occasions and origins of charismatic leadership in the sense of Weber's theory of legitimate authority.

A number of commentators, including Weber, have pointed out that the generation of charismatic leadership begins with a situation of extreme social stress or crisis (see Weber 1968, 18; Worsley 1968; Wilson 1975). Following this, severe deprivation and anxiety may arise among certain populations. If the current authorities are unable to alleviate the crisis or distress, resentment or alienation may occur. In this situation, if a leader comes forth with a message providing a promise of deliverance, people may react to him or her with a charismatically oriented response. The sequence could be summarised as follows (Willner 1984, 43):

CRISIS > DISTRESS > ASPIRANT LEADER + MESSAGE OF DELIVERANCE  
> CHARISMA

Following this formula, the theoretical explanations of charismatic leadership can be classified into four groups: 1) those that put the primary emphasis on social situation or context of crisis; 2) those that emphasise the psychic states of potential followers; 3) those that emphasise the message, and lastly; 4) those that emphasise the leader. The fourth approach is by far the most uncommon. (Willner 1984, 42-43.)

With regard to the first hypothesis, explaining the generation of charisma by social situation, empirical evidence seems to suggest that the crisis is a conducive but not a necessary condition for charismatic leadership to arise. Political scientist Ann Ruth Willner (*ibid.*, 51-53) discusses several cases of political leadership that appear to involve no clearly identifiable preceding crises. In some cases, the charismatic leader is the one that precipitates the crisis, reversing the sequence of events.

The second approach relies on the analysis of the psychological characteristics and personality structures of followers that render them susceptible to the appeal of charisma. Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1967) is a major influence on this orientation. In the Freudian view, the major cause lies in the weak psychological integration of the individual, who then needs a surrogate all-powerful father for a delegate omnipotence figure. In psychoanalytic theory, maturity and health are associated with an autonomous ego, and therefore, submissiveness and dependence on an external authority figure in an adult indicates pathology. However, as Willner notes, "it is not difficult to posit conditions and situations under which a quasi charismatic dependence upon leadership may be a rational adaptation mechanism of a normal ego" (1984, 54). The regression, if there is such, may also be controlled, and in the service of the ego.

The psychological basis for charismatic appeal is largely speculative at the moment. Very few clinical studies have been conducted on charismatic converts, and those that exist, do not lend support to the idea that converts differ to any significant degree from the average population with regard to mental health (cf. Gordon 1989; Weiss and Mendoza 1990).

Charles Lindholm (1990) has also focused on the emotional roots of charisma in his theory, rooting it fundamentally in the psychological states of individuals. He does not, however, see it as a product of a pathological mind but of common human propensities. He considers charisma a crucial source of emotionally grounded action, claiming that "it is not through rational argument, but primarily through forms of charismatic commitment, that people achieve the levels of self-sacrifice necessary for revolution and social transformation" (*ibid.*, 5). For Lindholm, charisma is essentially an emotional bond between leader and follower, rooted in a deep human desire to escape from the limits of self. It is in the group brought together by a charismatic leader that this extraordinary state of selflessness occurs. Through ecstatic communion, the result is achieved. What makes the leader charismatic is his or her capacity to produce collective effervescence and deep emotional identification with and among the followers. (*Ibid.*, 175.)

I think Lindholm is on the right track here. A drawback to his theory lies in its strong commitment to the idea of emotional community. It fails to explain cultic worship of saints and saviours, which does not aim at social action or at developing lasting communities of followers. Again, it is mainly political leadership and sectarian prophets that are considered prototypical.

A Second drawback is that Lindholm does not analyse the cognitive, as opposed to affective, roots of charismatic perceptions. This is a major issue certainly in need of further consideration.

Among the anthropologists and sociologists, theories focusing on the importance of the message seem quite prevalent. Peter Worsley stresses most strongly the audience and the message in the process of construction of charisma. His ideas are worth exploring more deeply. He starts with the notion of perception of charisma:

[A] charismatic appeal, ... if it is to become the basis of collective social action, needs to be *perceived, invested with meaning, and acted upon* by significant others: those who respond to this charismatic appeal. The mere recognition that X displays unusual qualities is itself a complex social process, entailing the evaluation of X by others according to some value yardstick: such qualities must be positively registered and appraised, both cognitively and emotionally. (Worsley 1968, xii.)

As Worsley notes, charisma, for a social scientist, can only be that which is recognised by believers and followers. Charisma is a function of recognition, a social relationship, and not an attribute of individual personality. This is where Weber's definition can be misleading. The charismatic leader is more than any other type of authority dependent on being accepted by followers (*ibid.*, xii-xiii). Traditional authority and legal-rational authority may be obeyed and regarded as legitimate even if the authorities themselves are disliked.

Worsley makes the point that mere striking personality or expressive behaviour alone does not make one a leader. Eccentric individuals are a legion. However colourful the personality is, if he or she lacks *a relevant message*, the likelihood of charismatic leadership emerging is nonexistent. A relevant message is one that fulfils two criteria: it must 1) appeal to unsatisfied desires in its recipients; and 2) offer some promise of eventual fulfilment (*ibid.*, xiii-xiv). Worsley sums up his argument neatly: "[t]he followers, then in a dialectical way, create, by selecting them out, the leaders, who in turn command on the basis of this newly-accorded legitimacy" (*ibid.*, xiv).

The most important element of this interaction is, in the opinion of Worsley, the message, and not the person of the prophet. The message speaks to the unrealised hopes and aspirations of the audience, consolidating them and giving them shape so that it may become the basis of organised collective action. The point is that in the extreme case, the message may pre-exist the person, who merely acts as a symbolic focus of identification in the movement with no real power. In some cases, the leader may actually be absent altogether or there may be many leaders. In many cases, the symbolic significance enhances only after the leader is no longer physically present. A charismatic leader may be focused upon

as a catalyst, symbol and message-bearer. The followers are never merely passive subjects but are active participants in a social process. (Ibid., xiv-xvi.)

From this perspective, it is only natural that what is to be focused on is the culturally conditioned nature of the message (ibid., xviii). Furthermore, the focus is to be shifted from the milieu of the prophet to that of the social groups that receive the message (ibid., xxxviii). Consistent with this 'bottom-up' view of charisma, Worsley claims that these movements normally arise among the oppressed and the disinherited sectors of society (ibid., xxxix). These three points have actually been the fundamental starting points of the vast amount of sociological research conducted in the field of new religious movements during the last forty years or so.

All of these claims are very much connected with the notion of centrality of the message at the heart of the charismatic appeal. But, is the message really everything? Commenting on this question, sociologist Bryan Wilson (1975, 20) notes that "[t]here are enough cases of leaders who, despite radically changing the message that they give to their following, retain their followers' trust, thus indicating that the congeniality of the message does not explain everything".

Wilson focuses on a slightly different aspect of the message, that is to say, the *rhetorical style*. The theory was developed in the context of trying to explain the persistence of charismatic appeal in modern societies.<sup>3</sup> Wilson claims that the source of strength of charisma lies in its crudeness and primitiveness. The charismatic leader appeals to the primitive needs of man. They extol primary virtues such as love, forgiveness, brotherly care and communal sharing. These are the virtues of close, interpersonal, face-to-face relationships. The rhetoric of charisma also employs vivid tangible imagery of the body and biology: race, blood, purity, native virtues, folk values, etc., are common vocabulary of charismatic leaders. (Ibid., 104-105.)

Ann Willner comments that "it may be less the content of a doctrine than how it is clothed and delivered that has bearing on the development of charismatic perceptions" (1984, 58). The message generally defines the situation in simple terms. It absolves people of blame, which is projected instead onto external agents. The message generally provides a vision of a better future that kindles hopes and restores people's sense of purpose. (Ibid., 56.)

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<sup>3</sup> Wilson defines charisma as "a relation of supreme trust in the total competence of an individual, whose qualities are 'supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional'" (1975, 25). According to Wilson, societies may be distinguished into two opposite types: one is modern and is organised through a high degree of specificity in role performance; the other is primitive and is composed of total persons. Charisma therefore belongs essentially to the latter: "[c]harisma is the extreme exemplification of thinking in a personal idiom" (ibid.). Wilson also claims that the occasions of charisma seem to be provided by wars and clash of cultures. In other words, charisma operates so as to break the existing order, but it also appears to emerge as a response to social disruption. (1975, 26-27.)



I think Wilson and Willner are heading in the right direction, although they do not develop the point extensively. While the nature of the message is crucial to Wilson, a definite change of emphasis occurs from what Worsley is suggesting. Worsley seems to hold that it is the specific aspirations of a specific social and cultural group that the message needs to be directed at to be successful. Wilson, in contrast, focuses more on pan-human needs and concerns: truthfulness, sincerity, power, love, caring and justice are values that touch people regardless of time and place. There is indeed some evidence for this. Many people report that they have had the powerful experience while listening to the speeches of certain gurus that what the guru is saying is directly addressed to them despite hundreds of other people being present. This phenomenon may be accounted for by the speech containing themes of such universality that they are capable of being read as descriptions of one's own situation. This would also explain why no specific social disruption or psychological disposition is required for the charismatic response to arise. The charismatic message is such that it appeals universally to human aspirations, dilemmas and quandaries.

However, to check the validity of this reasoning one needs to ascertain whether exposure to the message alone, without the intermediary of the person delivering it, is sufficient for charismatic conversion to occur. It is also noteworthy that many individuals or movements proclaim similar messages, while only a few are successful. Finally, cases of charismatic conversions have been reported in the absence of message or doctrine (see Willner 1984, 56-59). These are important issues that could be studied empirically. As far as I know, few systematic studies specifically address these points.

One of the more interesting empirical works on charisma that focuses on the leader's person is Willner's (1984) study of seven charismatic political leaders — namely, Castro, Gandhi, Hitler, Mussolini, Roosevelt, Sukarno and Khomeini.<sup>4</sup> On the basis of her analysis, Willner refutes that any of the aforementioned factors are sufficient to explain charismatic leadership:

Crisis may be highly conducive to it but is neither a necessary nor a sufficient cause. Psychological propensities in people that disorient them or render them otherwise susceptible to a felt need for a strong leader are also conducive factors but may not be necessary and are not sufficient. An im-

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<sup>4</sup> Anthony Storr's (1997) psychoanalytically inspired study is similar in approach. Storr analyses ten "gurus" or spiritual teachers to find common psychological denominators. However, the characteristics Storr lists as typical of "gurus" reveal a rather strong bias. Gurus are characterised as being introverted and narcissistic, intolerant of criticism, elitist, anti-democratic, dominating and often sexually irresponsible and exploitative. Further they are claimed to often direct every aspect of their followers' lives, invent a background of mystery, live in luxury and enjoy inflicting cruel punishments. (Ibid., xii-xvi.) Copley's (2000) biographical approach, although relying on Storr, is more historically sensitive.

pressive doctrine, message, or mission may be most conducive but is similarly neither necessary nor sufficient to catalyse charisma. (Ibid., 59-60.)

Willner concludes that the primary precipitant of charisma is the leader him- or herself. Willner's analysis of charismatic political leaders yields four catalytic factors that she claims are responsible for the generation of charisma:

- 1) The assimilation of a leader to one or more of the dominant myths of his society and culture.
- 2) The performance of what appears to be an extraordinary or heroic feat.
- 3) The projection of the possession of qualities with an uncanny or a powerful aura.
- 4) An outstanding rhetorical ability. (Ibid., 61.)

The question of rhetorical style has already been dealt with rather extensively. With regard to this, I suggest that it is specifically the element of the message that deals with pan-human experiences and evocative images that may be a clue to understanding charismatic messages. This does not preclude that the message is triggered by a particular situation and aimed at specific social and cultural audiences. The successful charismatic message may in fact combine both dimensions in a striking way.

It is especially the first, second and third factors that need to be considered here. One important thing should be noted. Willner claims that of all these factors are evidenced in the person of the leader. However, I would claim that they all belong equally well to the perceptions of the leader by his or her followers. It may be the case that the leader really does in some fashion project an uncanny or powerful aura. Despite this, I would agree with Worsley that it is the perception and social recognition of this "aura" that is of crucial importance. Therefore, one needs to look at the beliefs the followers hold with regard to their leader's person. It is fundamentally an interactive, communicative process that we are dealing with here, where both the leader's actions and the followers' perceptions play a mutually enhancing role. Apart from ubiquitous comments that there is a constant need of "signs and proofs" for the charismatic leader to remain popular, no systematic studies, as far as I am aware, focus on this dimension.

Willner suggests various indicators of followers holding supernatural beliefs concerning their leader. Three typical forms are: 1) equating the leader with a god or a deity; 2) seeing the leader as a saviour; 3) linking the leader with specific founders of religions (ibid., 20). Willner lists several items of belief that merit attention: prescience (ability to predict future), capacity to read other's minds, capacity to heal or harm without obvious causal links, ability to influence the elements, and, finally, invulnerability (ibid., 22). Thus, she tacitly acknowledges that it is really in the minds of the followers that these beliefs have to be located in the first place. Willner is not entirely clear on this account.

Concerning the invocation of myth, in a very significant passage, Willner gives us a clue to her approach, and it is worth quoting in full:

The deeper sources of charismatic conversion and attachment to a leader can be found in the common denominators and common symbols of a shared cultural heritage. They can be found in the myths that are transmitted from generation to generation in a particular culture. The leader who becomes charismatic is the one who can inadvertently or deliberately tap the reservoir of relevant myths in his culture and who knows how to draw upon those myths that are linked to its sacred figures, to its historical and legendary heroes, and to its historical and legendary ordeals and triumphs. He evokes, invokes, and assimilates to himself the values and actions embodied in the myths by which that society has organized and recalls its past experience. (Ibid., 62.)

Again, two items are noteworthy. First, she is unclear whether it is the capacity of the leader to assimilate him- or herself to the myths that is important, or whether it is in the minds of the followers that this needs to take place in order for it to be effective. Second, we are left with the impression that charisma can only be generated if the leader and the followers share the same cultural heritage. That is to say, charisma is a product of so-called “cultural construction”. In light of the previous analysis of the message component, my hypothesis here is also that charisma depends crucially on pan-human cognitive mechanisms and processes of human interaction, and not on the specific cultural mind-set.

### **2.3 Charisma and its routinisation**

There are other lessons, however, that can be learned from Worsley’s critique, even if we do not quite agree that the message is to be construed as a more significant factor than the leader’s personality. It can also be argued that to focus on a particular type of leadership, or even message, is misguided in itself. In fact, far more important than the particular features of leadership is the general idea of two different forms of religious organisation: the charismatic and the ‘routinised’. Weber (1964, 363-386) noted that in order for charisma to be transformed into a more permanent, routinised structure, its anti-economic and communal character must be forsaken. Some stable form of economic structure has to be adopted and the laity must be distinguished from professional clergy. This deep chasm between the charismatic aspects and more ordinary, routine aspects of religious social organisation should itself be taken as an explanandum, and not only a single aspect of it, whether it be leadership, message structure, economics or social stratification.

Anthropologist Harvey Whitehouse's recent reformulation of charismatic dynamics in his theory of the divergent modes of religion makes precisely this point (1995; 2000; in press). As Whitehouse (1995, 203-217) notes, distinguishing emotionally intense, charismatic religiosity and its routinised counterpart is a recurrent theme in sociological and anthropological studies of religion. Many scholars besides Weber have noticed the tendency of religion to be organised into two contrasting types (see, e.g. Gellner 1969; Lewis 1989; Turner 1995).

What Whitehouse attempts to do is to provide a cognitive explanation for this bifurcation of religious organisation. The two modes, the 'imagistic' and the 'doctrinal', are characterised by twelve different variables (see Table 3).

The imagistic mode of religiosity, closely resembling Weber's charismatic community, is characterised socially by an intense group cohesion, achieved in small-scale communities with a more egalitarian structure of authority and less uniform beliefs. The doctrinal mode of religiosity (Weber's routinised form of religion), by contrast, is characterised by less intense social cohesion but larger scale communities, more centralised structure of authority and more uniform belief systems. (Whitehouse 1995, 193-199; 2000, 99-124.)

These two forms of sociopolitical organisation depend crucially on a cluster of psychological variables, the most significant of which has to do with human memory (Whitehouse 2000, 5). The imagistic mode is precipitated by rarely performed, highly stimulating and dramatic rituals, which are encoded in participants' *episodic memory*. Episodic memory refers to mental representations of personally experienced events. Imagistic rituals are typically highly arousing or 'ecstatic', frequently employing physical pain inflicted by torture (sub-incision rites, deprivation of food, sleep and shelter, exposure to the elements) so that the episodes are irrevocably etched into the participants' memory with vivid detail. The imagistic ritual allows and encourages spontaneous and subjective religious expression and is generally characterised by individually generated multivocal imagery ('spontaneous exegetical reflection'). (Whitehouse 1995, 194-199; 2000, 54-98.)

The doctrinal mode, by contrast, is typified by frequently performed rituals, with generally rather low levels of arousal. Such rituals are typically encoded in *semantic memory*, that is to say, mental representations of a general, propositional nature. The doctrinal ritual is characterised by logically integrated doctrinal schemas, moral exhortation and rhetorical sermonising. The religious doctrines are acquired from authority and show marked uniformity among participants. (Whitehouse 1995, 194-199; 2000, 54-98.)

The characteristic of dynamic leadership belongs to the doctrinal mode (see Table 3). Dependence on rhetorical ability and an abstract set of doctrines — rather than intense solidarity generated by commonly endured dramatic events — provides a setting for talented "missionaries" to emerge. The doctrinal mode is not tied to unique, personally witnessed events but is generalisable to the needs of vastly different audiences. The absence of clearly articulated doctrine posi-

tively hinders the emergence of strong leadership, and if and when leaders emerge, they tend to be passive focuses of symbolic reverence rather than real political leaders (Whitehouse 1995, 216).

It is worth emphasising that Whitehouse's theory does not provide an explanation for the *origin* of particular imagistic or doctrinal religiosities. The explanatory model he offers is a selective one, that is to say, he argues that the characteristics listed under the rubric of the imagistic mode enjoy a selective advantage when combined with non-frequently performed ecstatic rituals, whereas the doctrinal characteristics have an advantage when combined with frequently performed teaching-oriented ritual (Whitehouse 2000, 2; in press). The theory does not say that other combinations cannot exist, it merely states that there is a strong selective pressure to conform to either mode, depending on the transmissive frequency.

Table 3 *Divergent modes of religiosity*

VARIABLE	DOCTRINAL	IMAGISTIC
<b>Psychological features</b>		
1. Transmissive frequency 2. Level of arousal 3. Principal memory system 4. Ritual meaning 5. Techniques of revelation	High Low Semantic schemas & implicit scripts Learned/acquired Rhetoric, logical integration, narrative	Low High Episodic/flashbulb memory Internally generated Iconicity, multivocality, and multivalence
<b>Sociopolitical features</b>		
6. Social cohesion 7. Leadership 8. Inclusivity/exclusivity 9. Spread 10. Scale 11. Degree of uniformity 12. Structure	Diffuse Dynamic Inclusive Rapid, efficient Large-scale High Centralised	Intense Passive/absent Exclusive Slow, inefficient Small-scale Low Non-centralised

(Source: Whitehouse, in press.)

New religions, therefore, can exhibit combinations of different characteristics. It is not particularly surprising that in otherwise doctrinal NRMs there may be leaders who are apprehended through imagistic codification (multivocal symbolism, spontaneous exegetical reflection, etc.), or vice versa. With regard to charismatic leadership, the theory is rather robust; it does not have the nuanced grading of charisma (magician > prophet > priest) of the Weberian terminology. On the other hand, the two approaches do not seem to be irreconcilable. The concept of 'prophet' clearly belongs to the doctrinal mode of religiosity (dynamic leadership). Therefore, it is no surprise that it gravitates towards increasing routinisation (priesthood). The divergent modes of religiosity theory predicts that the imagistic elements in connection with leadership enjoy a selective disadvantage in doctrinal religion. In imagistic traditions, on the other hand, leadership should gravitate towards the more diffuse and decentralised charisma of mystagogues and magicians.

## 2.4 Conclusion

To sum up, I have argued here for a specific approach to the study of charisma. I have also identified several important issues for research. The first issue concerns the delimitation of the focus, namely religious representations, associated with charisma.

As I have tried to indicate, very little attention has been paid to the specifically religious representations attached to the leaders of new religious movements. The concept of 'charisma' as such suffers from the lack of attention to its religious dimension. I will opt for the more general definition of charisma, the one which does not include the notions of 'leadership' and 'emotional community of followers' as necessary components. I shall, however, restrict it to persons. From a very large pool of different kinds of religious representations, I shall define 'charisma' as referring to those religious representations that are associated with persons. In this definition, alongside prophets and founders of religions, various kinds of magicians, sorcerers, witches, shamans and mystagogues are included.

The second issue that I have emphasised is that of universality versus cultural specificity of the cognitions behind charismatic appeal. Does charismatic appeal lie in the needs, expectations and psychology of particular cultural constituencies or does it go deeper into pan-human propensities, or some combination of the two? In the absence of previous arguments in favour of the universalistic approach, I think it is profitable to explore further in that direction. A cognitive description and explanation of charismatic phenomena is needed. An additional reason to focus on this aspect is that since Weber's groundbreaking work, much new knowledge has been gained in the fields of conceptual

development, human information processing, communication theory and cognitive psychology. Although the cognitive science of religion is a relatively new field, a number of significant theoretical developments with regard to cognitive mechanisms have emerged that account for the special nature of religious and ritual representations (see Pyysiäinen and Anttonen, in press).

The third major implication of my previous argument is that — in line with other researchers — I believe charisma arises in a social relationship and is not to be localised solely in the psychology or the actions of the leader. Psychological comparisons of charismatic persons would probably yield very little real information on the matter. However, studying the beliefs of the followers concerning their leader might yield more useful results. In other words, charisma is not to be found by solely analysing the actions and utterances of the persons who are considered charismatic. It is found by analysing them in connection with and through the *followers' perceptions of them*. As Worsley suggested, the perspective should be interactional.

Lastly, I consider Whitehouse's theory of the divergent modes of religiosity to be very suggestive. His characterisation of the two modes does seem to be supported by anthropological and sociological evidence.<sup>5</sup> However, representations of religious specialists tend to show characteristic features independent of the mode of religiosity in question. Charisma therefore merits attention in itself.

All of these issues shall be developed further in the following section dealing with the nature of cognitive approach to communication and religious representations.

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<sup>5</sup> See *Journal of Ritual Studies* 16 (2), Review Forum, for critical discussion and evaluation of the theory.

## SECTION THREE

# Cognition, communication and religious representations

In the previous section, I outlined the basic premises of the sociological and psychological approaches to charismatic phenomena. As I indicated, one of the criteria of an adequate approach is that it studies the phenomenon in terms of interaction and communication. According to this approach, charismatic representations originate in behavioural interactions between a certain key person and a social group that focuses on this person. 'Charisma' denotes those religious representations which the social group entertains of its leading personality as a result of these interactions.

What, then, are religious representations? Is there a clearly identifiable set of specifically religious representations? As we saw in the previous section, Weber identified religion through belief in spirits. These were characterised as indeterminate and invisible beings, somehow endowed with volition. In connection with charismatic leadership, he talked about supernatural, superhuman and exceptional powers. Willner also mentioned beliefs regarding the leader's extraordinary capacities, such as mind-reading, the ability to know the future, to heal or harm without obvious causal connection and invulnerability. What do such beliefs have in common? What makes them indicative of charisma and in what kind of processes do they originate?

The main purpose of this study is to find answers to these kinds of questions. The strategy adopted here is not to test a narrowly conceived, pre-formulated hypothesis concerning such issues. Rather, my aim is to give as complete a description as possible of all evidence in the material that has bearing on these issues. That is to say, I shall describe every category of charismatic representation found in the material and try to find adequate explanations for them.

I do not, however, start the description and analysis from scratch. The analysis of the data is produced from a specific theoretical angle, namely, that of cognition and culture research, which is an emerging sub-field within the broader



family of disciplines known as cognitive science.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, this section is devoted to providing an overview of this area of study and defining some of the key theoretical concepts that will be used throughout the analysis.

The basic thrust of the cognitive explanations concerning religious phenomena is that they should be made continuous with treatment of related human properties. Biologist Robert A. Hinde (1999, 231) argues the case succinctly: the recurrent aspects of religious systems depend on pan-human psychological characteristics and can, at least to a large extent, be understood on that basis. The explanatory project therefore has two crucial steps: 1) the identification of pan-human psychological characteristics of relevance to religious practices; and 2) the assessment of the manner in which such characteristics contribute to the various aspects of religion (*ibid.*, 15-17). Thus, the task here is to get some idea of relevant pan-human psychological characteristics.

I shall begin by describing some characteristic features of cognitive description and explanation. After this, I shall give an outline of the theory of communication, which forms the basis of the approach developed here. The key point advanced is that the theory must allow for the spontaneous emergence of novel and striking representations on the basis of deeply embedded structures of mind, whether of cultural or pan-human origin. I will specifically argue against the idea that there must be a commonly held, culturally transmitted ‘code’ or ‘world view’ for charismatic representations to emerge.

Next, I will introduce various key theoretical concepts, such as ‘frame’, ‘cultural model’ and ‘essentialism’, and show their relevance in understanding human everyday experience. Special emphasis will be laid upon the idea of ‘frame violation’ as it has been developed by social psychologist Erving Goffman (1986). This notion, in turn, is enriched by the idea of ‘counterintuitiveness’, developed by anthropologist Pascal Boyer (see e.g. 1994; 2001). Both of these ideas have a bearing on our understanding of religious phenomena.

Fourthly, I shall explore the role of emotion in human information processing and look into the issue of ‘religious experience’ in general. I shall conclude by examining the complex issue of ‘secondary framing’, which has to do with ritual and many other complicated intersubjective definitions of situations.

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<sup>6</sup> Cognitive science is often characterised as a loose affiliation of disciplines rather than a discipline of its own. The disciplines most commonly included are artificial intelligence (AI), psychology, neuroscience, linguistics, anthropology and philosophy (Gardner 1985, 7). Cognition and culture research focuses on the interactions between mind and culture and includes academic areas such as cultural, biological, and cognitive anthropology; developmental, cognitive, social, and evolutionary psychology; archeology; linguistics; philosophy; and study of religion (see e.g. the *Journal of Cognition & Culture* and the International Culture & Cognition Program, n.d.). Cognitive science of religion has its roots mainly in cognitive psychology and anthropology (see e.g. Malley 1994; Andresen 2001; Pyysiäinen 2001b).

### 3.1 The nature of cognitive approach

In a very broad sense, cognitive science can be described as an attempt to explain how the *mind* works (Johnson-Laird 1993, 26; Varela, Thompson and Rosch 1993, 4). The main tasks that the mind is capable of performing are the following: perceiving the world; learning; remembering; controlling actions; cogitating and creating new ideas; communicating with others; and, finally, creating the experience of feelings, intentions and self-awareness (Johnson-Laird 1993, 27).

The workings of mind are studied in terms of *information processing*. Cognitive science focuses on the ways humans, animals and certain artefacts process information. As John Tooby and Leda Cosmides put it: “[a] cognitive description specifies what kinds of information the mechanism takes as input, what processes it uses to transform that information, what kind of data structures (representations) those procedures operate on, and what kind of representations or behaviours it generates as output” (1992, 64).

‘Representation’ is a widely used technical term that, on the most general level, refers to something that stands for something else for someone (or something). In other words, representations are formed by a relationship involving three terms: that which is represented, that which represents and the user of the representation. Representations can be either mental or public. Widespread representations may be termed ‘cultural’ (Sperber 1996, 32-33). However, to avoid misunderstanding, we need to distinguish this general concept from those more specific ones advocated by different schools of cognitive science, such as functionalism (or representationalism) and connectionism.

Functionalism is a position that starts from the assumption that intelligent functions carried out by different systems may reflect the same underlying process. Even if the “hardware” of the brain is vastly different from that of the computer, the “program” that carries out the operations may be assumed to be the same. Part of the attractiveness of this position is its entailment that cognitive science stand on its own. One can study mind without knowing anything about the material organisation of the brain. (See e.g. Johnson-Laird 1993, 23.)

From the functionalist viewpoint, mental operations are likened to computation, that is, a procedure that reaches the desired goal in a finite number of steps, manipulating a finite number of symbols, i.e., what mathematicians call an ‘algorithm’ (ibid., 38). Within this scenario, it is often assumed that everything we see, hear or learn is stored in our minds as a separate representation of that thing. Our concept of ‘cat’, for instance, is a particular point which is related to other concepts through structural relations. (Goldblum 2001, 116-117.)

The connectionists, in turn, have pointed out that it can be misleading to treat the inner states of a living organism as representations in the sense of mirroring the external world. From their point of view, the important thing is that the inner states of the organism achieve a co-ordination of its behaviours in an

adaptive fashion, and this may not depend at all on being able to internalise a symbolic replica of the external world (Clark 1997, 146-171).

The most radical version of anti-representationalism and anti-computationalism rejects the whole notion of content-bearing information processing. The claim is that specific inner states of the system should not be thought of in terms of structured, symbolic, representational or computational processes. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger, for instance, stressed that our practical dealings with the world, like hammering nails, do not involve detached representing so much as functional couplings. (Clark 1997, 146-171.) Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch (1993) call such an approach 'embodied cognition'.

Many of these more critical positions seem to be based on an overly narrow definition of representation. The status of an inner state as a representation does not depend on its detailed nature but on the role it plays within the system. It may be thought of either as a static or temporally extended process, local or distributed, accurate or highly inaccurate. (Clark 1997, 146-171.)

However, a more serious objection can be raised about the computer-metaphor of the mind. The idea of the human mind as a carefully engineered machine has been more appealing than that of the mind as a biological organ with an evolutionary history. It has been pointed out that this may largely account for the unpopularity of *emotion* as a subject of cognitive science (e.g. LeDoux 1998). Some cognitive scientists do not even consider the study of emotions to be part of the field. It is not that the existence or importance of emotions as aspects of mind are denied, but a widespread tendency does exist to separate emotion from attention, perception, memory, reasoning and other more common subjects of cognitive study.

The exclusion of emotion from the study of mind is, however, unfortunate for the study of interactions between mind and culture. Especially for anthropological and psychological studies of religion, the exclusion of emotion, and the experiential side more generally, may lead to a rather impoverished view of the phenomena studied. Not surprisingly, numerous anthropologists and scholars of religion have already stressed the importance of emotion for many religious phenomena in their cognitive theories (e.g. Whitehouse 1996; 2000; Pyysiäinen 2001a; 2001b).

Neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux (1998) is also very critical of the cognitive approaches that exclude emotion from the study of mind. He argues that cognitive science which deals only with thinking, reasoning and intellect is really a science of only a part of the mind. As LeDoux (1998, 25) puts it: "[m]inds without emotions are not really minds at all". In recent years, it has also become increasingly clear that cognition is not as logical as previously thought and that emotion is not as illogical as it may appear. Thinking does not involve pure reasoned rules of logic, and emotion may contain evolutionary wisdom which is not easy to fathom by even the best calculus. (Damasio 1996; LeDoux 1998, 34-35.)

In emotions, unlike in thinking and reasoning, the brain does not usually function independently of the body. LeDoux (1998, 40) says that “[i]f the biological machine of emotion, but not cognition, crucially includes the body, then the kind of machine that is needed to run emotion is different from the kind needed to run cognition.” The functionalist position that manipulation of symbolic representations can be approached independently of the knowledge of the nervous system does not apply. The computer can not be programmed to have an emotion because it does not have the right kind of composition.

LeDoux (1998, 37-38) takes the position that processes underlying emotion can be studied using the same concepts and experimental tools that are used to study any other cognitive skill. Emotional states are best viewed as the end result of information processing occurring unconsciously. Just as one can study perception in terms of how the brain processes information received from visual stimuli, one can study emotion in terms of how the brain processes the emotional significance of stimuli. Just as the processing of visual information creates accompanying subjective perceptual experiences, the processing of emotional information creates emotional experiences. In other words, there is no reason why study of emotion could not fit into the cognitive framework.

This position has the important consequence that mind is not to be equated with brain but with brain and body. Some critics have insisted that even this may be an overly restricted approach. As philosopher and cognitive scientist Andy Clark (1997, 53) expresses it: “[m]ind is a leaky organ, forever escaping its ‘natural’ confines and mingling shamelessly with body and with world”. Biological mind is an organ for controlling biological body. What we should focus on is *situated reasoning*, that is to say, reasoning of embodied beings acting in a real physical environment (Clark 1997, 1-4). Fred Adams and Ken Aizawa (2001) criticise this position by pointing out that mere use of tools does not mean that cognitive processes themselves extend to the physical world, beyond the bounds of the brain and the body. Thus, the term ‘cognition’ should be restricted to refer only to those processes that take place within the organism. Nonetheless, it may be important to look at the cognitive processes in terms of their total situated context, involving other actors and coupled with artefacts in a physical environment. Ethnographic evidence is by no means unimportant in the study of mind (see e.g. Whitehouse 2001).

### 3.2 Cognitive theory of communication

The first step towards a more situated approach to mental processing is to get an idea of how *interpersonal transmission* of information can be approached within the cognitive frame of reference. The term ‘communication’ denotes a focus on the processual aspects of information exchange. Communication is a process involving at least two information-processing devices. On a most basic level, com-

munication takes place when one device modifies the physical environment of the other in such a way that the second device constructs representations similar to the representations stored in the first device (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 1). To give an example, in oral communication, the speaker modifies the acoustic environment of the hearer so that the latter is capable of forming thoughts similar to those of the speaker. In this case, human beings are the processing devices and ‘thoughts’ are more formally understood as conceptual representations.

Two general models of communication exist: one is called the *code model*, and the other, the *inferential model*. Communication is achieved in the former by encoding and decoding messages, and in the latter by producing and interpreting evidence (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 2). A good example of the code model is French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory of language (1916). The most well-known examples of the inferential model are philosopher Paul Grice’s theories of meaning and conversation.

For the code model, the above description of communication can be rephrased as follows: the representations internal to the communicating devices are called *messages*. The messages are transformed into *signals*, which are the modifications of the external environment so that the other device may recognise them. A *code* is a system, which pairs messages to signals in a systematic way. The pairing of messages to signals in order to communicate them is called *encoding*. At the receiving end, the signals are again turned into messages by a process of *decoding*. The classical formulation of communication in these terms was presented by Shannon and Weaver (1963).

In Western treatments of the subject, the code model has been enormously popular. The whole semiotic (or ‘semiological’, in Saussure’s terminology) approach is a generalisation of the code model to cover all forms of cultural communication (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 2-7).

However, as Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (1995) have argued, the code model is inadequate when dealing with human communication. There is more involved in humans comprehending each other than a code. Developments in linguistics have shown that human language has some strikingly unique features. The assumption that all systems of communication share similar structures has therefore become untenable. A number of anthropologists tried to approach cultural and artistic symbolism in terms of the code model but failed to uncover a code in the strict sense. No semiotic law was ever found. As Sperber and Wilson put it: “[w]hat a better understanding of myth, literature, ritual, etc., has shown is that these cultural phenomena do not, in general, serve to convey precise and predictable messages” (ibid., 8).

The code model commits us to a psychologically untenable hypothesis of mutual knowledge. For example, when interpreting an utterance of a linguistically encoded sentence, an individual generally uses a set of premises that constitute a context for the utterance. Context is a psychological construct that includes assumptions about the world. It is not simply the immediate situation; expecta-

tions, beliefs and cultural assumptions may all play a role in interpreting the utterance. Now it is fairly evident that these assumptions differ widely even within the same linguistic community. Therefore, the only way to ensure that people actually understand each other is to ascertain that the context used by the hearer and the speaker is the same. The code model commits one to a strong hypothesis of mutual knowledge, without which it is difficult to talk about decoding in the strict sense. (Ibid., 15-18.)

Sperber and Wilson do not deny that humans need shared information to communicate — quite the opposite. Instead of the psychologically untenable notion of mutual knowledge, they developed the concept of a *mutual cognitive environment*. An individual's cognitive environment is a product of both physical environment and cognitive abilities. This notion is analogous to visual perception, where visible phenomena are a product of physical environment plus visual abilities. The cognitive environment of an individual is a set of facts that are *manifest* to him or her. The notion of 'manifestness' which Sperber and Wilson use is epistemologically weaker than 'known'; something can be manifest and false, whereas nothing can be known and be false. From this perspective, the idea of 'mutual manifestness', or a 'mutual cognitive environment' which consists of mutually manifest facts, does not suffer from the psychological implausibility that the mutual knowledge hypothesis does. (Ibid., 38-41.)

Sperber and Wilson argue that two different forms of communication actually exist: the coding-decoding mode and the inferential mode (ibid., 27). These may exist in pure forms, in other words, purely inferential communication and purely code-dependent communication. Human verbal communication is a complex form of communication that comprises both of these modes. "Linguistic coding and decoding is involved, but the linguistic meaning of an uttered sentence falls short of encoding what the speaker means: it merely helps the audience infer what she means" (ibid., 27).

Inference is at the heart of Sperber's and Wilson's theory. Inference can be defined as a "process by which an assumption is accepted as true or probably true on the strength of the truth or probable truth of other assumptions" (ibid., 68). However, the inference as understood here should not be confused with formal logic. We are dealing with non-demonstrative inference. As Sperber and Wilson (ibid., 69) put it: "[N]on-demonstrative inference, as spontaneously performed by humans, might be less a logical process than a form of suitably constrained guesswork. If so, it should be seen as successful or unsuccessful, efficient or inefficient, rather than as logically valid or invalid."

Sperber and Wilson are mainly concerned with explaining human communication and especially with accounting for verbal utterance interpretation in terms of linguistic meaning and contextual factors. There is no need here to go into the technicalities involved in this specialised area of communication study. For present purposes, it is sufficient that the basic assumptions are covered, namely, the importance of inferential processes in communication, and the ideas

of context, contextual effects and a mutual cognitive environment. It is, however, one thing to say that successful communication involves some shared information; it is quite something else to specify of what it consists, how it is structured and how it is to be analysed.

### **3.3 The deep structures of knowledge**

A crucial aspect in processing new information is to combine it with an adequately selected set of background assumptions in memory. These assumptions constitute the context for the new information. For example, as linguists have shown, the appropriate ingredients for extracting the meaning of a sentence are not all found in the sentence itself. The sentence "I like apples" is implicitly and automatically understood to refer to eating, and thus, to the taste of apples. Communicators consult a large repertoire of knowledge structures to understand even a simple sentence (Schank and Abelson 1977, 9-10). Again, it is generally agreed among cognitive scientists that conceptual information in long-term memory is organised into larger structured units, variously labelled as 'schemas', 'frames', 'scripts' or 'prototypes' (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 137-138).

This much is generally accepted. However, as Roger Schank and Robert Abelson state, "there is a very long theoretical stride [...] from the idea that highly structured knowledge dominates the understanding process, to the specification of the details of the most appropriate structures" (1977, 10). To analyse human communication in depth, we need to have some sort of theory of the ways in which humans organise their assumptions. Can we identify any basic schemas that are frequently employed by humans in the task of understanding? In what follows, I will introduce various ways in which the highly structured knowledge in the human mind can be conceptualised.

#### **3.3.1 CULTURAL MODELS**

The most common approach to highly schematic knowledge in human minds within anthropology has its starting point in the idea of cultural knowledge. The fundamental premise within much of anthropology is that a major part of the organisation of human knowledge consists of shared presuppositions of the world that humans have acquired as members of society. One hardly needs to stress the importance of culture in the analysis of religious representations. The most striking characteristic of religious ideas is that they seem to differ so markedly from one social group to another. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that to account for them one must place them within the context of other widely shared cultural representations (see e.g. Geertz 1973).

Perhaps the most clearly articulated view of what cultural knowledge consists of comes from the field of cognitive anthropology. Within this field, the theoretical approach to deep structures of knowledge is captured by the term

‘cultural model’. Anthropologists Naomi Quinn and Dorothy Holland (1987, 4) define cultural models as “presupposed, taken-for-granted models of the world that are widely shared [...] by the members of a society and that play an enormous role in their understanding of that world and their behaviour in it”.

According to Strauss and Quinn (1997, 85), there are five centripetal tendencies that characterise cultural understandings. Firstly, their hallmark is durability in individuals. Once acquired, they have a tendency to be retained in the memory. Secondly, cultural understandings have emotional and motivational force. In other words, people act upon the knowledge they have. Thirdly, cultural understandings can be surprisingly durable historically. Cultural items of belief can be reproduced generation after generation. Fourthly, cultural understandings are characterised by thematicity. This means that a model or a schema can be repeatedly applied in widely differing contexts. Fifthly, cultural understandings are characterised by being widely shared.

The most important item in the preceding list is the notion of thematicity. Using different terminology, anthropologist Bradd Shore (1996, 53) calls the more general, abstract models ‘foundational schemas’. These are mental schemas that “organise or link up a ‘family’ of related models” (ibid.). The point here is that in many societies one can perceive a tendency to exploit a relatively small number of foundational schemas to structure a large number of more specific models. For example, Shore describes a ‘modularity’ schema that seems to be an organising principle of many American institutions (1996, 116-163).

The term ‘cultural’ has often been used to denote any knowledge that is widely shared and durable both individually and historically. However, Strauss and Quinn impose an important restriction: the term ‘cultural understandings’ excludes shared experiences of the natural world or the schemas that are the “product of experiences arising from innately programmed behaviours” (1997, 7). In other words, the genetically determined organisation of human knowledge is not included in the notion of a cultural model. For this reason, we have to take a deeper look at the ways in which human knowledge can be organised through our genetically determined make-up. It is no use labelling those understandings cultural which humans possess the world over.

### 3.3.2 PRIMARY FRAMES AND THEIR VIOLATIONS

Since this study mainly concerns interpersonal communication, people’s experiences of each other and the representations governing their interactions, it is useful to look more closely at theories at this level of analysis. Much social psychological work has been done that has bearing on the schemas and frames, beginning with Kurt Lewin’s ideas on ‘life spaces’ in the 1940’s. Also groundbreaking is Gregory Bateson’s article *A Theory of Play and Fantasy* published in 1955 (1972), where he develops the notion of a psychological frame. However, by far the most sustained attempt to deal with the way humans define their everyday situations is that of Erving Goffman (1986). Goffman acknowledges that his notion of the



‘frame’ is derived from Bateson’s article, but he gives it descriptive content far beyond Bateson.

Goffman starts with the concept of ‘primary frameworks’. The term ‘primary’ refers to the lack of dependence on original or prior interpretations. The primary framework renders an aspect of a scene, which would otherwise be meaningless, into something meaningful. Frameworks allow the user to “locate, perceive, identify and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms” (ibid., 21).

With regard to content, Goffman identifies two clearly distinguished classes of primary frameworks, which he labels 1) the natural and 2) the social or the ‘guided doings’ frames. Natural frameworks identify occurrences as unanimated and unguided by any wilful agency, whereas social frameworks provide background understanding for events that do incorporate “the will, aim and controlling effort of an intelligence, a live agency, the chief one being the human being” (ibid., 22). With regard to the natural frame, success and failure are not imaginable, and no sanctions are involved. One is dealing here with purely physical determinants and constraints, not deeds or actions. In the social frame, however, events can be evaluated in terms of honesty, good taste, elegance, etc. Motive and intent are always involved, and the chains of cause and effect start with mental decisions of some kind. “When the sun comes up, a natural event; when the blind is pulled down in order to avoid what has come up, a guided doing” (ibid., 24).

It is worth noting in this connection that while Goffman often qualifies his statements with caveats like “in our Western society”, he does hold the enumerated frames to be universal in some sense:

It seems inevitable that our interpretive competency will allow us to come to distinguish, say between an arm waved to signal a car on and an arm waved to greet a friend, and that both wavings will be distinguished from what we are seen as doing when we dispel flies or increase circulation. These discernments in turn seem linked to the fact that each idiom is being part of a distinctive framework. And here what is true of Western society is probably true of all other societies. (Ibid., 37.)

The simple device of separating two fundamental frameworks, according to which humans automatically and unconsciously organise their experience, allows one to account for their ability to recognise and distinguish certain classes of phenomena which depend on *violations of frameworks*. Goffman mentions five different categories of phenomena, which directly point to perceived violation of unconscious expectations in terms of the primary frames: the ‘astounding complex’, the ‘exhibition of stunts’, ‘muffings’, ‘fortuitousness’ and ‘tension’. These classes of phenomena are worth looking at more closely.

The events in the class of ‘astounding complex’ are identifiable by their leading observers to doubt their own overall approach to events. It seems that to

account for the occurrence of certain kinds of events, new kinds of either natural forces or active agents need to be allowed. Goffman lists such phenomena as apparent visitations from outer space, healing miracles, sightings of monsters, demonstrations of levitation, mathematically gifted horses, fortune-telling and messages apparently received from the dead. All these phenomena suggest extraordinary natural forces and guidance capacities (ibid., 28). The point Goffman is trying to make is not that these phenomena prove anything extraordinary, just that for them to be perceived as ‘astounding’, one needs to all along be *expecting something else*.

Secondly, Goffman mentions the ‘exhibition of stunts’, by which he means the maintenance of control by some willed agency in near impossible conditions. Jugglers, tightrope walkers, daredevil drivers and such are prominent examples of this category. The third category of ‘muffings’ is the exact opposite of stunts: where effort is needed but lost is a question of muffing, whereas when loss of control is expected and yet maintained is a stunt. ‘Muffings’ denote those occasions when the agency loses control and becomes totally subject to natural forces, thus deviating from the intended course of action. Goffman mentions the kinds of sports where people have to learn to control various extensions to their bodies, which make the maintenance of control difficult (skiing, surfing, riding, skating). Another example is the appeal of the Laurel and Hardy type of comedy, which plays on the theme of incompetence. (Ibid., 31-32.) Again, the general argument is that “if individuals are ready to laugh during occurrences of ineffectively guided behaviour, then all along they apparently must have been fully assessing the conformance of the normally behaved, finding it no laughing matter” (ibid., 39).

By ‘fortuitousness’ Goffman means the kinds of events that are seen as significant and yet incidentally produced. All the events distinguished in ordinary parlance as “coincidences”, “luck”, “accident” and “happenstance” fall into this category. Especially noteworthy are the events that are seen as produced by natural forces but which operate on socially guided doings. There are also events that are caused by two or more individuals who are unknown to each other, and who, minding their own business, jointly produce a socially highly significant event. (Ibid., 33-34.)

The fifth item named by Goffman is ‘tension’, where the frameworks are seen to impinge on one another. For example, in Western societies, medical examination of the body of a patient is officially framed in the naturalistic frame, and yet this framing is often seen as vulnerable. Touching a naked body is easily interpreted in a social frame, and this produces a tension, which in turn gives rise to joking and various kinds of special efforts to maintain the needed frame. (Ibid., 35-37.)

### 3.3.3 COUNTERINTUITIVENESS

Recent work in psychology of the early conceptual development in children supports and enriches Goffman's analysis. In contrast to Goffman's rather intuitive methodology, these studies have a more solid experimental basis. In addition, these findings have been shown to explain the nature of religious concepts in a systematic and powerful way (see e.g. Boyer 1994; 2001; Pyysiäinen 2001). Here I shall restrict my treatment of the issue to the work of Pascal Boyer.

The cognitive studies have been concerned with what can be called "naive theories" or "folk theories" of broad domains of experience such as naive physics, folk biology or folk theory of mind. These studies have shown that distinctions between basic categories, such as *person*, *animal*, *plant* or *artefact*, are present from very early infancy. These ontological distinctions constitute what is called *intuitive ontology* (1994, 100-103; 1998, 878-879). Intuitive expectations about the behaviour of solid objects can be observed from the first months of life. By the age of 6, the various domain-specific principles are in place and govern people's expectations about physical, biological and cognitive aspects of their natural and social environment. These automatic expectations are produced by principles that are largely inaccessible to consciousness, and subsequent development and experience does not seem capable of altering them. (1999, 57-58.)

What is of special interest in the present context is the further result of these studies that besides ontological distinctions, evidence also exists for domain-specific principles of inference. In other words, identifying objects as belonging to these categories triggers specific forms of inference (1994, 103-113; 1998, 878). These inferential principles can be surprisingly rich and well organised. For example, identifying something as animal or plant triggers the following inferential principles:

- 1) All living things are grouped in terms of mutually exclusive, jointly exclusive taxonomies.
- 2) Taxonomic proximity is assumed to correlate with similarity.
- 3) An underlying essence is assumed to be the cause of outward appearance.
- 4) The structure is explained in terms of function. (Boyer 1998, 878.)

The same applies to 'intuitive psychology'. Intuitive principles guide the intentional explanation of behaviour applied to persons and animals. These explanations also involve rather finely structured assumptions concerning various mental entities and processes such as perception, beliefs, desires and intentions.

Relying on these findings, a highly systematic table of various combinations of ontological categories and inferential principles can be constructed (see Table. 4). The significance of this mapping is that it also enables us to systematically classify the anomalous inferences and ontologies found in religion, folklore and various forms of entertainment. Based on this categorisation, Boyer in fact argues that *religious ontological assumptions are identifiable by their consisting of direct*

*violations of intuitive expectations informing ordinary cognitions.* In other words, religious ontological assumptions involve *counterintuitive* elements. The most salient examples are religious ideas concerning agencies whose physical properties are counterintuitive (spirits, gods, ancestors, etc.). (1994, 117-118; 1998, 881-882.)

Counterintuitiveness is characteristic of religious assumptions, but religious concepts are not counterintuitive through and through. Religious concepts also typically activate a number of assumptions that do not violate intuitive assumptions (1994, 119-120; 1998, 881). That is to say, spirits may be invisible, but they still have beliefs, desires and intentions in much the same way as other agents do. People use intuitive psychology to account for spirits' behaviour.

Table 4 *Ontological categories and inferential principles*

		Inferential principles		
		Intentional	Biological	Physical
<b>Categories</b>	PERSON	X	X	X
	ANIMAL	X	X	X
	PLANT	-	X	X
	NATURAL OBJECT	-	-	X
	ARTEFACT	-	-	X

(Source: Pyysiäinen 1998, 18; Barrett 2000.)

Based on this systematisation, only a limited catalogue of categories exists of possible kinds of religious concepts (see Table 5). For example, the category of *person* may be combined with counterintuitive physical properties (invisibility), counterintuitive biological properties (immortality) or counterintuitive psychological properties (possession). Similarly, possible combinations of counterintuitive properties are listed in each of the basic ontological categories of *animal*, *plant*, *natural object* and *artefact*. Counterintuitiveness may consist either of breaches of expectations or transferral of inappropriate inferential principles — as in plants or artefacts which are treated as if they had a mind (Boyer 2000, 198).

Table 5 *Boyer's catalogue of the supernatural*

CATEGORY	INFERENTIAL PRINCIPLE	EXAMPLES
<b>Person</b>	Psychology (breached) Biology (breached) Physics (breached)	zombies, possession, mind-reading immortals, ancestors, virgin birth spirits, bilocation, teleportation
<b>Animal</b>	Psychology (breached) Biology (breached) Physics (breached)	speaking animals metamorphosis, werewolves flying frogs
<b>Plant</b>	Psychology (transferred) Biology (breached) Physics (breached)	plants that feel or understand abnormal size and growth burning bush, heavenly plants
<b>Natural object</b>	Psychology (transferred) Biology (transferred) Physics (breached)	mountain with a will bleeding stones materialisations
<b>Artefact</b>	Psychology (transferred) Biology (transferred) Physics (breached)	thinking statue bleeding statue UFOs

(Source: adapted from Boyer 2000.)

Looking at the list of possible categories of counterintuitive concepts, it becomes evident that within the religious domain by far the most significant are those that involve some kind of agency. It is often recognised that religious imagery involves “anthropomorphism” (see e.g. Guthrie 1993). As Boyer has noted, the term ‘anthropomorphism’ may, on closer examination, be misleading. Gods and spirits are not represented as having just any human characteristics — like size, shape, age-span, diet, skin colour, etc. The most important characteristic of the gods is that they are assumed to have minds in much the same way as humans. In other words, they are supposed to perceive, to have thoughts, memories, intentions, feelings, etc. Furthermore, the concept of mind is not limited to humans. Animals are also seen to have cognitive capacities, albeit to a lesser degree than humans. So the key here lies in our ideas of gods being organised around the notion of *agency* in general, not around a general humanlikeness. (Boyer 2001, 144.) Agents are distinguished by the action by pursuing goals and having intentional properties. More precisely, identifying something as an agent includes at least three intuitive assumptions: 1) it is an animate entity, that is, agents move on their

own accord and have internal sources of energy; 2) it is capable of acting according to purpose; and 3) it has the capacity to attribute mental qualities to others. (Lawson 2001, 149-156.)

In terms of the previous discussion, the domain-specific inferential principles, as described here, also set up specific kinds of primary frameworks. The ideas of intuitive ontology and corresponding domain-specific inferential principles result in a considerably more fine-grained approach that is closely aligned with Goffman's analysis. The 'natural event' framework can now be seen to include the subdivisions of physical and biological principles. Furthermore, the 'guided doings' frame can be more appropriately characterised as composed of intuitive psychology.

However, this works the other way as well: we can now see that what Boyer calls 'counterintuitiveness', belongs entirely to the Goffmanian category of the 'astounding complex', which implies the violation of expectations in terms of primary frameworks. On the other hand, the weaker violations of expectations, such as 'stunts', 'muffings', 'fortuitousness' and 'tension', are not accounted for by Boyer's theory, yet they may be equally relevant to the analysis of religious assumptions. The events in these categories do not lead us to doubt our ontologies, although they are produced by violations of our everyday expectations of how things work.

### 3.3.4 ESSENTIALISM

Another item related to categorisation should be introduced at this point. Psychologists Susan Gelman and Lawrence Hirschfeld (1999) argue that essentialism, i.e., attribution of an underlying, hidden essence to biological species, race, gender, kinship and the like, is a widely recurrent mode of understanding and a strategy for thinking about many aspects of the world.

Essentialist concepts are universally used to account for constancy over variation. The paradigm cases of surprising variation over time are provided by our biological environment: for instance, a seed turns into a tree, a baby into an adult, a hairy caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly. One can repeatedly observe how much the qualities of the biological species can vary, and yet occur predictably, sequentially and spontaneously over and over again. Nevertheless, the mechanism that produces these idiosyncratic changes is not obvious. Similarly, one can observe how two seeds of the same tree turn into very different specimens in different environments. One can be tall and slim, the other short and wide, while it is unmistakably the same species. Again, what exactly they have in common may sometimes not be so obvious. Of these kinds of observable phenomena, humans have developed concepts that include a notion of a hidden, causally efficacious essence. Essences are those hidden, identity-determining aspects that remain unchanged during morphological transformations, growth, reproduction and the like (*ibid.*, 426).

Many researchers have postulated that essentialism is especially connected to folk-biological reasoning and is only spread to other domains by analogical transfer. Boyer (1994, 155-184), for instance, argues that religious social categorisation is characterised by essentialism, which is transferred from its proper biological domain to thinking about the social environment. Even if folk biology provides the most striking examples of essentialist thinking, clearly there are other domains where essentialist thinking is equally prevalent. Essentialist thinking abounds in people's understandings of kinship and individuality (Gelman and Hirschfeld 1999, 426). Racial and gender properties are widely attributed to hidden essences that are fixed at birth, and even language is often thought of in these terms (*ibid.*, 415). Reviewing the evidence, Gelman and Hirschfeld found that essentialistic reasoning develops early and in parallel in different domains, which supports the argument that humans have a single conceptual bias for essentialist reasoning. As they put it: "essentialism appears to fall squarely within a larger class of related phenomena" (*ibid.*, 427).

Gelman and Hirschfeld do not, however, argue that essentialism would be a domain-general effect; i.e., not every domain is essentialised. It is more a question of "multiple instantiation" of an essentialist bias across several domains (*ibid.*, 431). They suggest it is one of a limited number of modes of understanding or construal. Other comparable ones that have been proposed include intentional, mechanical, teleological, vitalistic and deontological modes (*ibid.*, 431).

Essentialism, then is a mode of understanding that relies upon hidden, partly unknown essences. Gelman and Hirschfeld list six properties that essences share, regardless of the domain to which they belong:

- 1) A non-visible part/substance/quality in each individual (as an individual or as a member of a category)
- 2) The part/substance/quality is inherent and very difficult to remove.
- 3) The part/substance/quality has the property of transferability.
- 4) The transfer from parent/host to offspring/client does not diminish the amount of essence or its consequences for identity in the parent/host.
- 5) The non-visible part/substance/quality has vast, diffuse and unknown causal implications.
- 6) The implications include authenticity and identity. (*Ibid.*, 427.)

Thus abstracted, the essentialist principles can more easily be detected in non-biological domains. Intriguingly, Gelman and Hirschfeld postulate that various cultural ideas, such as contamination, fetishes and blessings, also depend tacitly on essentialist reasoning. As an example, they take the case of Hitler's sweater and the Pope's robe. While most people would feel uncomfortable with the idea of wearing Hitler's sweater, many seem particularly keen on getting a chance touch the Pope's robe. The importance that people spontaneously attribute to physical contact in these cases only makes sense from an essentialist per-

spective. Furthermore, the idea that people seldom can fully explicate what they expect the causal implications to be in these cases is consistent with essentialist reasoning. It is also thought that whatever it is that is special about Hitler's sweater, it is almost impossible to remove from the object without completely destroying it. (Ibid., 427-428.)

### 3.4 Emotions and feelings

The term 'religious experience' has achieved an important role in the study of religion. It is often argued that the "meaning" of many religious symbols, practices or institutions ultimately resides in the experiences they elicit in the minds of the practitioners (Sharf 2000, 267). Sometimes religion itself is explained through invoking special kinds of "religious" or "mystical experiences". Consequently, research into religion which does not pay sufficient attention to religious experience is dismissed as reductionistic.

As Robert Sharf (ibid., 268) notes, this use of the concept 'religious experience' is exceedingly broad. Anything from feelings, moods, perceptions, dispositions and states of consciousness can be treated as "religious experiences". The relationship of such religious experiences to more intense kinds of 'altered states of consciousness' (Tart 1975), as exemplified by trance states or mystical experiences, is almost never clarified.

For the present purposes, it is not necessary to go into the complex field of exceptional, dissociated states of consciousness encountered in spirit-possession or mystical contemplation. Large-scale, popular religious movements like that of the Hare Kṛṣṇa do not depend exclusively for their spread on these kinds of experiences, although some adherents may have them. It is much more likely that the ritual routines produce minor but rather predictable changes in the emotional states, feelings and moods of those who participate in them. Scholar of religion Ilkka Pyysiäinen (2001a; 2001b) has also recently argued for the importance of taking into account the emotions and feelings as part of the process of acquiring religious beliefs. For these reasons, it is more pertinent here to get an idea of how emotions and feelings in general have been conceptualised in the cognitive approach.

One of the most intriguing things about emotions is that they are not uniquely human traits like verbal language and higher-order consciousness seem to be. The structures of mind involved in emotions may therefore be the deepest of all. Brain systems that generate emotional behaviours are evolutionarily ancient. Some emotional systems in the brain are essentially the same in many vertebrates, including mammals, reptiles and birds. It is a curious fact that while evolution has changed many bodily traits, it has maintained emotional functions so conservatively. Part of the explanation possibly lies in emotions being tied to behavioural functions. Escaping from danger, for instance, is something that all



animals have to do to survive. Thus, one particular emotion, fear, and its attendant bodily expressions are so similar that they can often be recognised across species. Darwin, for instance, noted that all animals tend to urinate and defecate in the face of extreme danger. Many animals also erect body hair in dangerous situations. A direct gaze and baring of the teeth as signals of anger have also been observed among many animals. (LeDoux 1998, 107-109.)

Based on such findings, many researchers have tried to identify a set of basic, innate emotions. Surprisingly, no wide agreement exists on this matter. One of the methods that have been adopted in this search is to identify universally recognisable facial expressions. On the basis of such studies, various sets have been proposed. Paul Ekman, for instance, has suggested a minimal set of six basic emotions: surprise, happiness, anger, fear, disgust and sadness. Other researchers have introduced other emotions, such as interest, desire and surprise, to complete the list. The situation is rather complicated because expressions similar to those in an emotion can also arise independently of emotions. Moreover, an expression typical of one emotion can be present in other emotions as well. Crying can occur both in sadness and happiness. It seems that there are really no fixed “emotional responses” as such, just a repertoire of responses, which are put together according to the situation. (LeDoux 1998, 113.)

According to LeDoux (1998, 125-128), the basic building blocks of emotions are neural systems that mediate behavioural interaction with the environment, especially those behaviours that deal with fundamental problems of survival. Sorting out the universal behavioural functions is therefore the proper way to approach emotions also. It is very likely that different classes of emotional behaviour represent different kinds of problems the animal has to deal with in order to survive. Fear, for instance, can be properly identified as a product of the system of defensive behaviour. This is a system that detects danger and produces responses that maximise the probability of surviving a dangerous situation.

There are a limited number of behavioural strategies that animals can call upon to deal with danger: withdrawal, immobility, defensive aggression or submission. Again, it is striking how extensively these strategies can be observed in the various vertebrates. The underlying physiological changes that occur in dangerous situations are also stereotypical: a taut stomach, racing heart, high blood pressure, clammy hands and feet and dry mouth. Of course, different species and people fear different things, but physically the human and the rat respond in much the same way once danger is detected. (LeDoux 1998, 132-134.)

Following William James’ distinction, neurologist Antonio Damasio (1996, 131-134) distinguishes between developmentally early ‘primary emotions’ and adult ‘secondary emotions’. The latter depend on the formation of systematic connections between categories of experience and primary emotions. The point of the distinction is that we may be innately programmed to respond with emotion to certain types of perceptions, whether of the environment or of our bodies. The secondary emotions, however, depend on categorisation established through

learning and socialisation. Even if the triggers of emotions can be modified, the responses nevertheless utilise the machinery of primary emotions.

The process of secondary emotion can be divided into three steps. 1) The cycle begins with conscious deliberations about an object or situation. The consideration takes place through the use of mental images in a thought process. 2) At the same time, certain networks in the brain respond automatically and involuntarily at an unconscious level to the processing of these images. 3) The results of these unconscious and involuntary processes are signalled further so that the body is placed in the state typically associated with the triggering situation. This third step involves neurochemical processes which further affect the operations of the brain. (Damasio 1996, 137-138.)

Emotion, then, is a collection of changes in body states that are induced in different organs by the brain system as a response to the content of thoughts relative to a particular entity or event. Some of the changes in the body state, such as posture, skin colour, facial expression, sweating or rate of breath, can be detected by outside observers, while others, like faster heartbeat, can be perceived by only the person in whom the change takes place. (Damasio 1996, 139.)

The term *feeling* has a different meaning. Feelings are present in a brain that in addition to emotion systems also has the capacity for higher-order consciousness.<sup>7</sup> In other words, feelings are born out of the capacity to be consciously aware of one's self and the relation of oneself to the rest of the world (LeDoux 1988, 125). Feelings of fear, for instance, are a by-product of two neural systems: the system of defensive behaviour and the system that creates consciousness (ibid., 128). Damasio defines 'feeling' as the experience of the changes of body states in combination with the mental images that triggered them: "[a] feeling depends on the juxtaposition of an image of the body proper to an image of something else, such as visual image of a face or the auditory image of a melody" (1996, 145). Feelings like sadness, joy or happiness result from the combined perception of certain body states with whatever thoughts to which they are juxtaposed (ibid., 146).

A whole spectrum of feelings exists and they can be classified in several ways. Damasio (1996, 149-153) divides feelings into three different types. The first group is based on universal emotions (happiness, sadness, anger, fear and disgust). When the body exhibits the constellation of changes conforming to one of these emotions, and the constellation is perceived, one has the corresponding feeling. The second group of feelings is based on a variation of one of the primary emotions. Panic and shyness are each subtle varieties of fear. Ecstasy is a variety

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<sup>7</sup> This concept is based on the distinction made by Gerald Edelman (1994, 112). Higher-order consciousness involves the recognition by a thinking subject of his or her own acts or affections. It exhibits direct awareness of mental episodes without the involvement of sense organs. It denotes being conscious of being conscious. Primary consciousness, on the other hand, is the state of being mentally aware of things in the world — of having mental images in the present. It is also possessed by some non-linguistic and non-semantic animals.

of happiness. The third group originates in ‘background’ body states rather than emotions. The ‘background feelings’ denote a more sustained feeling or sense of being. Emotions tend to stand out as striking but momentary states, whereas a background feeling corresponds to the body state between emotions. The concept of ‘mood’ is related to the idea of background feeling. The background state of the body is monitored continuously, although the focus of conscious attention is usually elsewhere. However, sudden changes in body state, such as discomfort or pain, easily shift the focus back to the background state.

It is important to keep in mind that emotional behaviours may be accomplished with or without conscious awareness. If the capacity for conscious awareness is present, as it is in the case of humans, then conscious emotional feelings can occur. Even in the case of humans, however, emotional responses are for the most part generated unconsciously. Although conscious emotional feelings exist, we have little direct control over our emotional states. It may be for this reason that humans have devised ingenious ways of arranging external circumstances so that the stimuli that automatically trigger emotions will be present (LeDoux 1998, 17-19). Ritual, art, literature, architecture, drama and cinema are a few examples of this ability to construct indirect means of triggering emotions. Being so elusive and hard to control directly, emotions can become powerful motivators of behaviour.

### 3.5 Secondary frames

Emotions can be triggered through involvement in various kinds of action sequences that are designed for no other purpose. Sports and other kinds of entertainment seem to depend on yet another kind of framing — as both Bateson (1972 [1955]) and Goffman (1986) have pointed out. This kind of framing refers to a capacity to identify those sets of behaviours which are patterned after something that already has meaning in its own terms — the paradigmatic case of this being *play*. In play, the ordinary function of an act is not realised. The sequence of activity after which play is modelled (e.g. fighting) is not followed faithfully or completed fully but may be stopped abruptly or repeated endlessly with frequent role switches. Sometimes, great exaggeration of some aspect of the primary activity also occurs (Goffman 1986, 41-43). Here, it may be profitable to look at Bateson’s early formulations.

Bateson starts with the observation that communication always operates on many contrasting levels of abstraction. Analysing the case of animal play, Bateson observes that for play to be possible the participants must be able to recognise three different orders of messages: 1) messages of mood-signs, 2) messages which simulate mood-signs, 3) messages which enable the receiver to discriminate between mood-signs and those other signs which resemble them (1955, 189). The message “this is play” is of the third type; it is metacommunicative and its func-

tion is to set up a psychological frame: “[A] frame is metacommunicative. Any message, which either explicitly or implicitly defines a frame, *ipso facto* gives the receiver instructions or aids in his attempt to understand the messages included within the frame.” (Ibid., 188.)

In this way, psychological frames are likened to premises in logic: the frame indicates that a certain type of thinking is to be applied within the frame specified. The word ‘premise’ denotes a dependency of one idea or message upon another comparable to the dependency of one proposition upon another, which is referred to in logic by saying that the proposition P is a premise for Q (ibid., 186). Thus, frames of this order are crucial in the inferential processes of comprehension in both animals and humans. These frames help communicators delimit the possible inferences they might make of each other’s behaviour and utterances.

A crucial point, which both Bateson (1972 [1955]) and Goffman (1986, 41) note, is that not only humans but also animals are capable of play behaviour; in other words, they are capable of communicating these very complex kinds of frames. Moreover, cross-species communication of this order of complexity also exists. Humans are capable of playing with animals and different animals may be capable of playing with each other. This point is non-trivial. It means that the capacity of complex forms of metacommunication is universal among humans and of very early evolutionary origin.

Bateson recognises that extensive areas of human communication belong to the same level of complexity as play. *Threat, deceit, histrionic behaviour* and *ritual* all seem to depend on similar differentiations of primary behaviour and their simulations. However, Bateson’s analysis remains formal; it is only in Goffman’s work (1986) that we find a more comprehensive and systematic analysis of frames in terms of the content used in everyday life of human beings.

From observations of play, Goffman generalises a concept of ‘keying’, in which he refers “to the set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else” (ibid., 43-44).

Besides this systematic transformation of materials meaningful in accordance with a schema of interpretation, other notable features that characterise keying are as follows:

- 1) Participants in the activity know and openly acknowledge that a systematic alteration is involved.
- 2) Cues are available for establishing the beginning and the end of this transformation (in time and/or in space).
- 3) Keying is not restricted to any particular class of perspectives; anything can be turned into play.

- 4) Keying performs a crucial role in what we think is going on: playfight and playing home are felt to be more similar to each other than to either real fighting or domestic life. (Ibid., 45.)

Goffman attempts to make a list of the basic keys employed in Western society, which he groups under five headings: 1) *Make-believe* is the “activity that participants treat as avowed, ostensible imitation or running through of less transformed activity, this being done with the knowledge that nothing practical will come of the doing” (ibid., 48). This category includes playfulness, fantasy and dramatic scriptings. 2) *Contests* include combative sports, which are keyings of elementary fighting acts, but also institutionalised games in which primary framework is only a distant suggestion. 3) *Ceremonials* or *social rituals* are defined as keyings of life events: marriages, funerals, investitures, etc. They allow a single deed to be stressed among the ordinary texture of events. 4) *Technical re-doings* are “[s]trips of what could have been ordinary activity [...], out of their usual context, [performed] for utilitarian purposes openly different from those of the original performance, the understanding being that the original outcome of the activity will not occur” (ibid., 58-59). This category includes practising, demonstrations, exhibits, role-playing sessions (group psychotherapy) and experiments. 5) *Regroundings* are defined as “[t]he performance of an activity more or less openly for reasons or motives felt to be radically different from those that govern ordinary actors” (ibid., 74). The anthropological method of participant observation would be a paradigmatic example of this category.

Part of the definition of keying is that participants know what is going on. A whole other class of phenomena may be defined on the basis that one or more participants manage activity so that a party of one or more others will be induced to have a false belief about what is going on (ibid., 83). Goffman labels this class of phenomena ‘fabrication’. The idea of deceiving others has a negative ring to it, but fabrications can be either benign or exploitive. Where active intention or purpose is lacking, we may talk about ‘understandable errors’ or, more plainly, ‘illusions’ (ibid., 111-112).

One more issue with regard to frames needs to be mentioned briefly. The messages establishing second-order frames (in the order of play) precipitate paradox. As Bateson points out, the message “this is play” establishes a paradoxical frame. As was discussed above, play can be defined as actions that are modelled after some primary framework but do not mean the same thing. More formally, Bateson defines play as “These actions in which we now engage, do not denote what those actions *for which they stand* would denote” (1972 [1955], 180). In other words, the playful punch does not denote that which an ordinary punch would denote: hostility.

The issue may be illustrated by the following (ibid., 184):

All statements within this frame  
are untrue.

I love you.

I hate you.

The first message is formally similar to the message “this is play”. As is plain from the example, it is also a self-contradictory statement about itself. If the statement is true, then it must be false. The statement “all statements within this frame are untrue” is itself a premise in evaluating its own truth or untruth.

The significance of these reflections is that although both Bateson and Goffman are interested in interactional behaviour in general, these analyses stand at the foundation of such specifically religious phenomena as ritual and ceremony. All the above-mentioned concerning play applies equally well to religious ritual. In other words, ritual is a phenomenon that depends upon secondary framing. Therefore, the paradoxical logic found in representations of play also lies at the foundation of ritual representations and may be used to identify them.

### 3.6 Conclusion

Summing up, I have covered many issues in cognitive theory to set the ground for analysing religious representations of charisma. Since this study involves a religious tradition that has deep roots in a particular cultural tradition, namely, Hinduism, it is useful to look at how the cultural level of analysis could be done. Here, the concept of ‘cultural model’ was introduced.

However, since it is not at all obvious that the charismatic representations are only due to cultural understandings, several different theoretical notions of a more pan-human structure of understanding were introduced. Firstly, the notion of primary frameworks was explicated with the help of Goffman’s typology of natural and social frames. These, in turn, were shown to be involved in the human ability to distinguish certain classes of frame-violating phenomena, such as the astounding complex, stunts, muffings, fortuitous events and frame tension. These notions were also shown to be closely related to what Boyer calls ‘counter-intuitiveness’, a phenomenon typical of religious representations. Secondly, the nature of emotion and feeling was briefly explored. Thirdly, the notion of secondary frameworks was explicated using Goffman’s notions of ‘keying’ and ‘fabrication’, both of which depend largely on Bateson’s analysis of the play frame. Different sorts of keyings were described; among these were listed such identifiable

phenomena as make-believe, contests, ceremonials, technical redos and re-groundings. Lastly, the paradoxes of communication were examined.

The basic argument behind these explorations is that many different kinds of phenomena occurring in everyday social interaction and communication in human societies can be accounted for at least in part by looking at humans in terms of information processing. Communication involves inferences implicating new information that is contextualised in old information. The process can be described in terms of frames and intuitive domain-specific principles of inference. Even the processes of emotional responses to stimuli can be described in this fashion. It is precisely these things that one needs to pay attention to in order to make sense of more complex processes of human understanding, as exemplified by religion.





## PART II

### CHARISMA OF THE FOUNDER-GURU



## SECTION FOUR

# Theory of guru in ISKCON

In this section, I will explore the explicit, theologically correct understanding of the guru-disciple relationship in the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. As is true of most of the Hindu culture, ISKCON places a pronounced importance on the principle of guru in spiritual life. Within Hinduism generally, the word ‘guru’ means teacher, and specifically it means a teacher of religious knowledge or conveyor of religious insight (literally, the Sanskrit word means ‘heavy’). However, among different traditions, vast differences exist in how the significance of the guru in spiritual life is to be understood. At one end of the spectrum, the guru is regarded as a guide who can *show the way* to liberation for the disciples by virtue of his or her own realisation. In this case, the guru is seen as a helper and an educator, and is not usually worshipped. At the other end, the guru may be regarded as identical with God and actually capable of *bestowing* liberation for his or her disciples. In the latter case, the guru assumes the responsibility of liberating the disciple and is therefore an object of worship.

To get a proper grasp of how ISKCON defines the role and significance of the guru, I will first present a brief overview of the entire ISKCON theological structure. Having analysed the basic points of the ISKCON salvific scheme, we will be in a better position to understand the specific doctrines regarding the guru, which is the main topic of this section. The concept of the guru being intimately connected to the general structure of religious authority, I will analyse some aspects of the ISKCON power structure. Because this structure has changed considerably during ISKCON’s brief history, I will include some diachronic aspects in my analysis.

### 4.1 Overview of ISKCON teachings

ISKCON sees itself as a monotheistic tradition within a larger Hindu culture. It defines itself as a branch of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya* (denomination). It is not a new religion. Prabhupāda did not envisage himself as starting a new *sam-*

*pradāya*, he saw ISKCON merely as a contemporary extension of an ancient Vaiṣṇava tradition. According to ISKCON theological understanding, all orthodox traditions of Vaiṣṇavism derive from Kṛṣṇa, who is the original guru of all of them. In the traditional scheme, there are four orthodox disciplic successions (*paramparā*), the originators (*ādi-guru*) of which are said to be Lakṣmi, Brahmā, Kumāras and Śiva (Rudra). These correspond to the traditional four orthodox branches of the Vaiṣṇava tradition, deriving from such reformers as Rāmānuja (c. 1017 – 1137), Madhva (13<sup>th</sup> century), Nimbārka (12<sup>th</sup> century), and Viṣṇusvāmi (15<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>8</sup> The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, who are followers of Caitanya (1486 – 1534), claim descent from Madhva. Thus, according to the strictest definition, ISKCON is an offshoot of the Brahmā-Madhva-Gauḍīya *sampradāya*.

Vaiṣṇavism is a major tradition of Hinduism, emphasising worship of a personal God (whether conceived of as Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa or Rāma), selfless devotion and liberation through God's grace. Primary text of those devoted to Kṛṣṇa is the *Bhagavad-gītā* in the *Mahābhārata* and *Bhāgavata Purāna*, a south Indian scripture dating — according to modern calculations — from the ninth or tenth century (Brockington 1996, 148). *Bhagavad-gītā* teaches a form of theistic Hinduism that exalts the path of *bhakti*, translated by Prabhupāda as “devotional service”, as the supreme path to liberation. According to *Bhāgavata Purāna*, Kṛṣṇa is the supreme God, whose worship is the supreme form of devotion.

For Prabhupāda, it was of utmost importance that his disciples grasped that God is a person — although distinguished from other persons by being unborn and without any cause. God is defined by his “six opulences”, which all point to his nature as a person: full strength, fame, wealth, knowledge, beauty and renunciation (Prabhupāda 1977b). God is thus an all-attractive, all-powerful, omniscient, eternal and unlimited cosmic creator.

Kṛṣṇa, or the “Supreme Personality of Godhead”, is also said to have three primary energies or potencies: internal, external and marginal (Prabhupāda 1975, Text 2, purport). Living entities constitute the marginal potency. They are situated in between the other two energies. When they act under the internal or pleasure potency, manifested as Rādhārāṇī, they display their original constitutional position: constant devotional service to God. In such a condition their only engagement is to satisfy God. When, however, they act under the external potency, or *mahāmāyā* (“illusory energy”), they are subject to miseries such as birth, death, disease and old age. All living beings in this material world are under the external potency. Beyond this region of material universe exists a spiritual realm, the Lord's personal abode, which functions under the supreme nature of God, his

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<sup>8</sup> Sociologically, the Vaiṣṇava sectarian groups can be enumerated as follows: 1) *Śrī sampradāya*, founded by Rāmānuja, 2) *Brahma sampradāya*, founded by Madhva, 3) *Kumāra sampradāya*, founded by Nimbārka, 4) *Rudra sampradāya*, founded by Viṣṇusvāmi and Vallabha (1479-1531), 5) *Rāmanandins*, founded by Rāmananda (b. 1299), 6) Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, founded by Caitanya, and 7) Sant-tradition, founded by Kabir (1398-1518). (Klostermaier 1989, 334-335; Geden 1909, 94.)

internal potency. The whole of creation is thus a manifestation of God's energies and fully under His control.

Living beings are thus “parts and parcels of God” (Prabhupāda 1977b) and their original constitutional position is to serve the Supreme Being, God. However, living in the material world, they have lost their original consciousness, Kṛṣṇa consciousness, to material consciousness. This mundane consciousness is maintained by strong chains of attachment. Attachment to the material body and its pleasures, attachment to kinsmen and bodily relations, attachment to land of birth and material possessions, attachment to material knowledge and attachment to religious forms and rituals without knowledge of their real purpose are the five chains that keep one in a state of ignorance, which in turn brings misery. These attachments are so deep that they are almost impossible to uproot. (Ibid., 6.)

Although everyone in this material world is trying to achieve happiness, the effort is doomed to failure as long as one remains in a state of nescience, identifying with one's body under the power of illusion (*māyā*). As Prabhupāda puts it: “[p]eople try to rectify one mistake by making another mistake” (Prabhupāda 1975, Text 7, purport). Each materially motivated attempt ties one ever deeper into material entanglements in the repeated cycle of birth and rebirth (*saṁsāra*).

Real happiness is only achievable in the spiritual world. By going to Kṛṣṇa's spiritual abodes, one achieves eternal spiritual bliss. For this, one has to awaken the dormant Kṛṣṇa consciousness and cultivate it. This can be done through the practice of *bhakti* yoga. In the Indian tradition, numerous different types of yoga exist. The three basic types delineated in the *Bhagavad-gītā* are *karma*, *jñāna* and *bhakti* yogas. In the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, *bhakti* yoga is considered the highest form of yoga, especially suited to the present age. The significance of different yoga systems is explained through the concept of world-ages, or *yugas*. Prabhupāda explains that during the *satya-yuga*, or Golden Age, the recommended yoga system was meditational. One had to search for a secluded and sacred place and follow a very strict regimen of controlling one's eating, sleeping and posture. These, however, are considered extremely demanding in present-day conditions. In the next age, the *trētā-yuga*, the recommended practice was to perform great sacrifices. In the *dvāpara-yuga*, the method was large-scale temple worship. The present age is *kali-yuga*, its symptoms being quarrel and hypocrisy, and the recommended yoga system is chanting the holy name of God.

Chanting the holy name is really the “signature practice” of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. The ideas we have dealt with so far — *ātman*, *māyā*, *saṁsāra*, liberation and yoga — are standard items throughout the Hindu culture. The different sects and subsects are not so much differentiated through their philosophical doctrines as through their recommended form of *sādhana*, or spiritual practice. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism emphasises *bhakti* in the form of congregational chanting of God's names. This practice was popularised by Caitanya, a mystic and reformer who lived at the turn of the sixteenth century. Caitanya opposed the hereditary

caste system and drew disciples from all social classes. Among the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, he is held to be an incarnation of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

Table 6 *ISKCON teachings in a nutshell*

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- a. Supreme Personality of Godhead, named Kṛṣṇa, is the eternal, all-knowing, omnipresent, all-powerful and all-attractive cosmic creator.
  - b. Living beings are not to be identified as material bodies but as spirit souls (*ātman*), which are “parts and parcels” of God; every living being is eternally a subordinate servant of the supreme being, but living under the force of illusion (*māyā*), they have forgotten this fact.
  - c. Having lost their original pure consciousness, they futilely attempt to achieve happiness in the material world.
  - d. These attempts bring karmic reactions, tying the living entities ever more deeply into the material world for repeated lifetimes of misery (*saṁsāra*).
  - e. Liberation consists “going back to Godhead”, i.e. getting to Kṛṣṇa’s pure abodes in the spiritual world and serving Him eternally, which is the constitutional position re-established.
  - f. Liberation can be achieved by learning the “spiritual science” (*dharma*) under the guidance of a self-realised teacher (*guru*).
  - g. The latest incarnation of Kṛṣṇa, Caitanya (1486 – 1534), has established the principles of *bhakti yoga* most suitable for the people of our present age, namely, congregational chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* (*saṅkīrtana*).
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The God’s holy names to be chanted are encapsulated in a specific formula, or mantra, called the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, or the “great chanting for deliverance”: Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare. Prabhupāda explains the meaning of the words as follows: Kṛṣṇa and Rāma are forms of addressing the Lord himself and the word Hare is a vocative case of the word Harā. Harā, in turn, is the supreme pleasure energy of the Lord. The chanting is therefore a form of calling for the Lord and his energy, to give protection to the soul. “This chanting is exactly like the genuine cry of a child for its mother’s presence” (Prabhupāda 1972).

The theory behind the use of the *mahā-mantra* is that it revives one’s original Kṛṣṇa consciousness. As eternal spiritual souls, the living entities are originally Kṛṣṇa conscious entities, but due to association with illusory, external energy from time immemorial, their original consciousness is covered by accumulated “impurities”. Because of this “material contamination”, we are living in illusion, *māyā*. The basic principle of this illusion is that one imagines oneself to be a

lord of this material nature. Ideas like “I am the lord and the master”, “This is mine”, etc., are the most pernicious forms of this illusion. The theory of the mantra states that all these misgivings in one’s heart can be “cleansed” by chanting the holy names. When the “marginal energy” of God (i.e., living entities) turn into contact with the superior energy, Harā, real happiness is gained.

The sound of the chanting will automatically carry the hearer to the “transcendental platform”. This concept implies a hierarchical scheme, in which the other platforms in ascending order are bodily, mental and intellectual. To get to the transcendental platform, one has to realise that “I am not the body; I am not the mind; I am not the intelligence; I am a spirit soul”. The chanting is said to actually be enacted directly from the “spiritual platform”. One doesn’t even need to understand the language of the mantra for it to be effective. In fact, it is believed that Kṛṣṇa is “non-different” from His name; the name Kṛṣṇa is the “sound incarnation” of the person Kṛṣṇa. Chanting of the *mahā-mantra* establishes “transcendental sound vibration”, which has a great purifying effect on the surroundings. Through chanting one can even exorcise ghosts and demons. Simply hearing the name Kṛṣṇa has subtle spiritual effects.

It is said that one can feel a transcendental ecstasy within a brief period by chanting the mantra. The ecstasies that can be achieved are enumerated as follows: being stopped dumb, perspiration, hairs standing on end, dislocation of voice, trembling, fading of the body, crying in ecstasy and trance. Most of these are rare in the beginning, but after a short while, chanting may produce an urge to dance along with the chanting, which is seen as a transcendental sign. (Prabhupāda 1972.)

All this sounds very simple. However, to advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, one must be capable of chanting without offence. And the list of offences turns out to be rather extensive. There are ten offences against the chanting of the holy name, including such offences as not having complete faith in the chanting of the holy names and maintaining material attachments and giving some interpretation of the holy name of the Lord. An additional list of 32 offences in devotional service include detailed items such as not entering the temple to worship the Lord without having washed one’s hands and feet after eating. Thus, chanting without committing offences turns out to be rather difficult. (See Prabhupāda 1970b.)

Hearing and chanting about the glories of God are the two most crucial methods of advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Yet these are by no means the only ones available and recommended. According to an often quoted verse from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, there are nine legitimate methods of pure devotional service:

*śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ  
smaraṇam pāda-sevanam  
arcanaṁ vandanam dāsyam  
sakhyam ātma-nivedanam* (SB 7.5.23.)

The nine processes of devotional service mentioned in the verse can be translated as follows:

- 1) Hearing (*śravaṇam*) the name and glories of the Lord
- 2) Chanting (*kīrtanam*) his glories
- 3) Remembering (*smaraṇam*) the Lord
- 4) Serving the Lord's feet (*pāda-sevanam*)
- 5) Worshipping the Lord in temples (*arcanam*)
- 6) Offering obeisances (*vandanam*) unto the Lord
- 7) Acting as the Lord's servant (*dāsyam*)
- 8) Making friends (*sakhyam*) with the Lord
- 9) Surrendering oneself fully (*ātma-nivedanam*) to the Lord

Not all nine processes are required for the execution of devotional service. As Prabhupāda explains, by performing only one of these nine without deviation, the mercy of God can be attained. Hearing of the holy name of God is appropriately the first and most essential step in devotional service, or *bhakti*. It is significant that the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra is not meditated silently at all in the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. Even if one is reciting the prayers alone, one should do it aloud so that one can hear it. Three separate forms of chanting are differentiated in ISKCON terminology. Chanting the mantra softly, for one's own hearing, preferably with the help of the prayer beads, is called *japa*. Chanting the mantra loudly to be heard by others is called *kīrtana*. Congregational chanting of the mantra is called *saṅkīrtana*.

Items 4 – 6 refer mostly to the temple worship of images of God. *Arcana*, or temple worship, is especially recommended for householder devotees (see section 5 for details). The last three items refer to rather advanced stages of devotional life. The expression *ātma-nivedanam* refers to full dedication of the body and soul to the Supreme. (See SB 7.5.23-24 purport.)

There are successive stages of spiritual development. Devotees are classified into three groups according to their spiritual advancement. The devotee on the lowest platform of devotional service is called *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī*. The neophyte devotee has firm faith but is unfamiliar with the conclusions of the sacred scriptures. Such a devotee is only interested in worshipping in the temple and does not yet know how to behave appropriately towards other people. The devotee on the middle platform is called *madhyama-adhikārī*. These are ideal preachers who are well-versed in the scriptures, can convince others and are able to discriminate between favourable and unfavourable persons and things. On the highest platform are the *uttama-adhikārī* Vaiṣṇavas. They are described as completely pure of heart and as having attained the realised state of unalloyed Kṛṣṇa consciousness. However, the devotees at the highest stage do not discriminate between Vaiṣṇavas and non-Vaiṣṇavas. They regard everyone as a Vaiṣṇava but themselves. Therefore, in order to preach these devotees have to descend to the middle plat-



form. *Uttama-adhikārī* Vaiṣṇavas can be recognised by their ability to convert many fallen souls to religion. (Cc. Ādi 7.51 purport; SB 4.22.16 purport; Prabhupāda 1975, Text 5, purport.)

Having surveyed the main doctrines of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement, we are now in a better position to reflect upon the overall purpose of the society instituted by Prabhupāda. ISKCON's article of incorporation enumerates seven purposes for the society:

- a. To systematically propagate spiritual knowledge to society at large and to educate all peoples in the techniques of spiritual life in order to check the imbalance of values in life and to achieve real unity and peace in the world.
- b. To propagate a consciousness of Krishna, as it is revealed in the Bhagavad Gītā and Śrīmad Bhagwatam.
- c. To bring the members of the Society together with each other and nearer to Krishna, the prime entity, thus to develop the idea within the members, and humanity at large, that each soul is part and parcel of the quality of Godhead (Krishna).
- d. To teach and encourage the sankirtan movement, congregational chanting of the holy name of God as revealed in the teachings of Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu.
- e. To erect for the members and for society at large, a holy place of transcendental pastimes, dedicated to the Personality of Krishna.
- f. To bring the members closer together for the purpose of teaching a simpler and more natural way of life.
- g. With a view towards achieving the aforementioned Purposes, to publish and distribute periodicals, magazines, books and other writings. (Constitution of Association 1966.)

The one striking element in this statement of purpose, which is not quite obvious in the doctrines introduced so far, is the stated aim of changing society at large into one of more spiritual orientation. Indeed the first item states that ISKCON is founded for the purpose of systematically propagating spiritual knowledge “for society at large” and to “educate all peoples in the techniques of spiritual life”. Looking at the teachings alone, one may get the impression of a world-fleeing mysticism aimed at advanced spiritual states of personal ecstasy. This, however, is not the ethos of the movement at all. ISKCON is a preaching movement aimed at a total reformation of the materialistic civilisation. For Hindu religiosity, this emphasis on intellectual content of religion and vigorous propagation of it for the benefit of society at large is highly unusual, and thoroughly distinctive of Prabhupāda's approach. This missionary zeal for transmitting the intellectual content of religion (see Table 6) rather than personal mystical experience is a theme that recurs in Prabhupāda's teachings and career over

and over again in different contexts. It is, however, not entirely his own invention but derives from his guru, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. In terms of Whitehouse's schema, this feature clearly belongs to the doctrinal mode of religiosity. As we shall see in the next subsection, it also turns out to be the structuring principle of the guru-disciple relationship.

## 4.2 The guru-disciple relationship

If hearing and chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra are sufficient for spiritual advancement, why does one need a guru? As it turns out, it is not just any hearing that will have the proper effect. The mantra chanted by a pure devotee of the Lord in love is said to have the greatest efficacy on hearers (Prabhupāda 1972). In fact, the devotees are advised not to hear the holy name chanted by non-Vaiṣṇavas, such as professional singers, who are common in India. This kind of professional chanting is compared to milk touched by the lips of serpents. It will not have the proper effect. (Cc. Antya 1.101 purport.)

For the mantra to have effect one has to receive it from spiritual sources. As Prabhupāda explains, the mantra must be chanted after having been heard from an authorised guru, or “spiritual master”, as the term is translated in ISKCON. Quoting *Padma Purāṇa*, Prabhupāda states that unless one is initiated by a bona fide spiritual master in disciplic succession, the mantra is without effect (SB 6.8.42 purport.). In another context, Prabhupāda qualifies this statement somewhat by saying that “[a]lthough the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* is powerful in itself, a disciple upon initiation receives the mantra from his spiritual master, for when the mantra is chanted by the spiritual master, it becomes more powerful” (SB 4.24.31-32, purport). In any case, the effect of the mantra is channelised through *paramparā*, or disciplic succession. As Prabhupāda puts it:

A bona fide spiritual master chants the holy names [...] and the transcendental sound vibration enters into the ear of the disciple, and if the disciple follows in the footsteps of his spiritual master and chants the holy name with similar respect, he actually comes to worship the transcendental name. When the transcendental name is worshiped by the devotee, the name Himself spreads His glories within the heart of a devotee. When a devotee is perfectly qualified in chanting the transcendental vibration of the holy name, he is quite fit to become a spiritual master and to deliver all the people of the world. (Prabhupāda 1968.)

### 4.2.1 QUALIFICATIONS OF THE GURU

In the previous citation, Prabhupāda indicates that to become a spiritual master, one has to qualify. Simply hearing the chant from someone is not sufficient to pass it on. To be able to pass it on, one has to qualify in chanting. There are actu-

ally a number of qualifications for becoming a guru. The most important of these can be summarised under four headings:<sup>9</sup>

- 1) The spiritual master must follow strictly the principle of disciplic succession and of scripture.
- 2) The spiritual master must have spiritual knowledge and be learned in Vedic literature.
- 3) The spiritual master must be able to free his disciples from birth and death and lead them back to Godhead.
- 4) The spiritual master must teach by example.

The principle of *paramparā* is of the utmost importance in the ISKCON guru concept. In a speech delivered at Stockholm University in 1973, Prabhupāda compared the guru to a cloud and a mailman. Just like the cloud takes its water from the sea and pours it on land in the form of rain, the guru is a mediator bringing mercy from Kṛṣṇa. Similarly, when a mailman delivers a large amount of money to a recipient, it is not the mailman's own money that is being given; the guru carries no currency of his or her own, but that of God. Therefore, a genuine spiritual master will never say "I am God — I can give you mercy". A genuine spiritual master, on the other hand, will say "I am a servant of God, I have brought you His mercy." The first qualification of a guru is, therefore, that he or she delivers one a message that genuinely originates from God. And since everyone in this material world is suffering, this message should be one that stops "the blazing fire of anxiety in the heart" (Prabhupāda 1978).

From this principle, it follows that the authority of the guru is by no means absolute. For one thing, the guru is not thought to be God. The guru is only a representative of God. Since every living being is thought to eternally be the subordinate servant of God, the same holds true for the guru. He is a servant of God *par excellence*. His job is to deliver God's message unadulteratedly. God's message, in turn, is already inscribed in the sacred scripture. Secondly, a Vaiṣṇava who has become a guru does so by virtue of being a faithful disciple of a previous guru in the disciplic succession. There are thus two authorities to which a genuine guru is always held accountable: the scripture (*śāstra*) and the previous teachers in the tradition (*sādhū*). As a teacher, the guru is therefore supposed to instruct his or her students strictly in accordance to the scripture and the teachings of the previous exemplary devotees. These three sources of authority — guru, *śāstra* and *sādhū* — are the ones that should be used to determine the truth of any statement concerning religion.

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<sup>9</sup> In a compilation work from Prabhupāda's writings, Subhānanda dāsa has categorised the qualifications under 14 headings as compared with my four. As the following discussion will hopefully show, most of the other ten categories can be subsumed under one or another of these four. (Prabhupāda 1990.)

In a more recent publication, Śivarāma Swami defines a guru as “anyone who gives instructions on the basis of revealed scriptures” (1999, 35; see also Cc. Ādi 1.34 purport). This definition captures well the emphasis that Prabhupāda laid on spiritual knowledge as the main commodity transmitted along the disciplic succession. Prabhupāda distinguished among three different kinds of gurus: The devotee who first gives one information about spiritual life is called the *vartma-pradarsaka-guru*, the guru who shows the way. The guru who first initiates one into chanting of the *mahā-mantra* is called the *dīkṣa-guru*. The gurus who give instructions for progressive advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness are called *śikṣā-gurus*. (Cc. Ādi 1.34 purport.) It is not that the *dīkṣa-guru* gives no instruction; quite the contrary, the logic is that one should accept initiation from one’s primary instructing guru.

This emphasis on *śikṣā*, or instructions based on revealed scriptures, is rather significant. Although initiation is linked to the chanting of the *mahā-mantra*, the role of the guru is not defined on that basis alone. The transmission of the “transcendental sound vibration” in initiation is not emphasised as the foundation of the guru-disciple relationship. The basis is rather the transmission of revealed knowledge.

This forms a stark contrast to many other neo-Hindu movements, where the initiation into the mantra empowered by the guru is given primary emphasis. In fact, Prabhupāda ridicules such emphasis as magical:

For advancement of material knowledge there is a need for personal ability and researching aptitude, but in the case of spiritual knowledge, all progress depends more or less on the mercy of the spiritual master. [...] The process should not, however, be misunderstood to be something like magical feats whereby the spiritual master acts like a magician and injects spiritual knowledge into his disciple, as if surcharging him with electrical current. The bona fide spiritual master reasonably explains everything to the disciple on the authorities of Vedic wisdom. (SB 2.1.10 purport.)

In other words, when Prabhupāda talks about *paramparā*, or disciplic succession, he is not mainly concerned with *dīkṣa*, i.e. how to transmit the “transcendental sound vibration” of the mantra. This is not of primary importance to him, whereas the principle of *śikṣā* is. What concerns Prabhupāda is that the knowledge be kept intact by the transmission, not the power of the mantra. The knowledge, in turn, is not capable of being transmitted in a single ceremony of initiation. It requires a deep commitment to an ongoing relationship.

The position derives from a specific theory of knowledge. Human beings are considered limited in their capacity for knowledge. The senses are limited and tainted by the force of illusion in the form of various attachments. Therefore, it is held that it is impossible to come to the knowledge of God through one’s own effort alone. What is required is that we submissively accept the knowledge that

God himself has given in the form of revealed scriptures and transmitted through the disciplic succession. As Prabhupāda puts it:

Five thousand years ago Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa spoke the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and Vyāsadeva recorded it. Śrīla Vyāsadeva did not say, “This is my opinion.” Rather, he wrote, *śrī-bhagavan uvaca*, that is, “The Supreme Personality of Godhead says.” Whatever Vyāsadeva wrote was originally spoken by the Supreme Personality of Godhead. [...] Consequently, Śrīla Vyāsadeva is a guru. He does not misinterpret the words of Kṛṣṇa, but transmits them exactly as they were spoken. (Prabhupāda 1977d.)

The spiritual master is therefore an authorised representative of Kṛṣṇa coming in the disciplic succession. From this theory, it follows rather naturally that one of the most important qualifications of being a guru is that one has mastered the knowledge of scripture in accordance with the tradition. The spiritual master must be learned in the Vedic literature. Prabhupāda is emphatic that no material consideration, such as caste or social status, should override the criterion of thorough and authorised knowledge of Kṛṣṇa.

All devotees, whatever their spiritual stature, can be considered gurus insofar as they transmit revealed knowledge according to disciplic succession. However, important qualitative distinctions are made within the category of guru. The first can be made with regard to the degree of commitment of gurus to their disciples (Śivarāma 1999). The so-called *vartma-pradarsaka-guru*, the person who first invokes the disciple’s interest in spiritual life, may have no special commitment to the disciple other than giving proper introduction to the path. The *śikṣā-guru*, one who gives instruction regarding philosophy and doctrine may also make no deeper commitment beyond that of an educational role. However, the *dikṣa-gurus* (initiating gurus) are supposed take responsibility for guiding the disciple to Godhead. In other words, the initiating gurus should take full responsibility for the spiritual wellbeing of their disciples. As Prabhupāda puts it: “There are many spiritual masters, but Rṣabhadeva advises that one should not become a spiritual master if he is unable to save his disciple from the path of birth and death. Unless one is a pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa, he cannot save himself from the path of repeated birth and death.” (SB 5.5.18 purport.)

Prabhupāda has even stated that the spiritual master be willing to return to the material world to deliver a sincere disciple (Śivarāma 1999, 46). Such gurus take upon themselves a serious commitment. As Śivarāma Swami puts it: “The *dikṣa-guru* is that devotee who has given the most regular *śikṣā* to his follower. By that standard, their relationship in neither incidental nor cursory, but long standing, strong and intimate.” (Ibid., 44.)

In the above case, such a responsibility is not recommended to be given to a person unless he or she is an *uttama-adhikārī*, a devotee on the topmost platform of devotional service. Although according to a more general definition, anyone

who transmits transcendental knowledge on the basis of scripture is to be considered a guru, Prabhupāda is careful to point out that Vaiṣṇavas of lesser spiritual stature cannot effectively lead their disciples toward the ultimate goal of life. Instead, Prabhupāda advises that “a disciple should be careful to accept an *uttama-adhikārī* as a spiritual master” (Prabhupāda 1975, Text 5). Prabhupāda also recommends that one should not become a spiritual master unless one has attained the platform of *uttama-adhikārī*, although, strictly speaking, Vaiṣṇavas of lesser stature are not prohibited from accepting disciples (ibid.).

The final major qualification of guru is that he or she should teach by example. The idea is simply that pure devotees not instruct their subordinates about anything without acting accordingly themselves (SB 2.9.40 purport). This may seem like a trivial detail, but from a larger perspective, it turns out to be of major significance. In some traditions, when a person reaches high spiritual attainments, it is supposed that he or she should no longer be judged by conventional moral and rational standards. In such cases, it is easily supposed that apparently irrational or immoral behaviour serves some higher purpose of which ordinary mortals remain unaware. By inclusion of this fourth qualification, the ISKCON guru may not take recourse to such an argument. No special criteria of behaviour are applied to the most advanced devotees. Whatever he or she does, can and should be judged by the principles given in scripture and tradition, which apply to everyone equally.

It directly follows from this principle that the behaviour of the guru should always be exemplary. The guru’s qualifications are there for all to see. Insofar as the guru does not hide his activities, most of his qualifications are in plain view: whether the guru follows scripture and disciplic succession, whether he or she is knowledgeable in Vedic literatures, whether the guru can train his or her disciples to advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness — all of these qualities can be observed and judged by using critical intelligence.

Again, it follows that if the guru is seriously misqualified according to observational evidence, the disciple is instructed to reject him or her. As Prabhupāda states: “Anyone who is supposed to be a *guru* but who goes against the principle of Viṣṇu-*bhakti* cannot be accepted as a *guru*. If one has falsely accepted such a *guru*, one should reject him.” (SB 8.20.1 purport.) He also says that a guru who “engages in abominable action and has lost his sense of discrimination is fit to be abandoned” (Bg. 1.5 purport.). In other words, there are two circumstances in which the guru may be rejected. The first is a situation in which one has accepted someone as a guru without properly ascertaining whether this person qualifies and later finds out that he or she does not. The second situation is one in which a previously qualified guru has fallen due to indulgence in sensual pleasures or doctrinal deviation. (See Śivarāma 1999, 92-93.)

These qualifications of the guru are important in that they clearly indicate that the status of the guru is not absolute. The role of the guru is circumscribed within the narrow limits set by scripture and tradition (see Ravindra Svarūpa

1994a). This should be kept in mind when looking at how the subservient role of the disciple is characterised.

#### 4.2.2 THE ROLE AND DUTIES OF THE DISCIPLE

As we saw previously, the role of the guru is defined in terms of transmission of transcendental knowledge. The guru is to transmit religious knowledge exactly as it was received without changing it in any way. His primary duty with regard to the disciple is to enlighten and instruct. The guru should also engage the disciple in devotional service. The role of the disciple is complementary to that of the guru; it is predicated on the ideal of unhesitating acceptance of the guru's instructions and orders. Subhānanda dāsa's (Prabhupāda 1990) compilation of categories for the disciple's duties regarding the guru (as they are set forth in Prabhupāda's books) are very revealing:

- 1) The disciple must inquire and hear from the spiritual master.
- 2) The disciple must strictly follow the instructions of the spiritual master.
- 3) The disciple must serve the spiritual master.
- 4) The disciple must satisfy and please the spiritual master.
- 5) The disciple must have faith in the spiritual master.
- 6) The disciple must be submissive and humble.
- 7) The disciple must honour and respect the spiritual master as a manifestation or representative of God.
- 8) The disciple must avoid committing offences against the spiritual master.

First of all, the disciple should make relevant inquiries concerning spiritual life. The desire to know is the essential cornerstone of the relationship. As Prabhupāda states, "[w]ithout inquiry, we cannot make advancement" (Prabhupāda 1973). But the inquiries should be made properly. They should concern relevant spiritual topics and they should be made with a proper attitude. Since the instructions received from the guru are by their very nature based on revealed knowledge, one's attitude in receiving them should be humble and submissive. It is expressly condemned to challenge the spiritual master. Whatever the spiritual master says should be accepted unhesitatingly.

The most interesting item in the list is undoubtedly the seventh. It indicates that the spiritual master should be offered the same worship one would offer to God. Actually, the duties to serve, to please and satisfy, and to avoid committing offences against the guru can all be seen as extensions of this injunction to worship the guru. They all indicate that the guru is a sacred being, worthy of special ritualistic deference.

We saw previously that theologically speaking, the guru should not be identified as God but as a representative of God. It is especially said that a genuine guru never claims to be God. Rather a genuine guru should say "I am the most humble servant of the servant of the servant of God" (Prabhupāda 1977a). And

yet the duty of the disciple is to worship the guru “as good as the Supreme Personality of Godhead” (SB 7.14.41). It is even stated in the scripture that the spiritual master is non-different from Kṛṣṇa: “Lord Kṛṣṇa in the form of the spiritual master delivers His devotees” (Cc. Ādi 1.45).

Thus, it seems that the guru is here identified with God after all. In the purport to the above verse, Prabhupāda explains the apparent contradiction:

The relationship of a disciple with his spiritual master is as good as his relationship with the Supreme Lord. A spiritual master always represents himself as the humblest servitor of the Personality of Godhead, but the disciple must look upon him as the manifested representation of Godhead. (Cc. Ādi 1.45 purport.)

In a speech delivered in 1973, an enlightening passage by Prabhupāda elucidates this issue further:

In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (18.66) Kṛṣṇa instructs: [...] “Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reaction. Do not fear.” Someone may argue, “Where is Kṛṣṇa? I shall surrender to Him.” But no, the process is that we first surrender to Kṛṣṇa’s representative; then we surrender to Kṛṣṇa. Therefore it is said [...]: the guru is as good as God. When we offer respects to the guru, we are offering respects to God. Because we are trying to be God conscious, it is required that we learn how to offer respects to God through God’s representative. In all the *sāstras* the guru is described to be as good as God, but the guru never says, “I am God.” The disciple’s duty is to offer respect to the guru just as he offers respect to God, but the guru never thinks, “My disciples are offering me the same respect they offer to God; therefore I have become God.” As soon as he thinks like this, he becomes a dog instead of God. [...] God is always God, guru is always guru. As a matter of etiquette, God is the worshipable God, and guru is the worshiper God (*sevaka-bhagavān*). (Prabhupāda 1977d.)

The point of all this is that, according to the principles of *bhakti*, one should surrender to God completely, and God in turn grants liberation for the sincere devotee. But not just any surrender counts as genuine. One has to surrender to an authorised spiritual master. In other words, the devotee should think of his or her relationship with the guru as equal to the relationship with God. It is in this context of completely surrendering oneself to God that the expression “guru is as good as God” is to be understood.

When looked at from the disciple’s position, the guru is indeed identified with God. It is the guru who bestows liberation to the disciple. But the guru in turn cannot conceive that it is he or she personally that liberates the disciple. As



we saw previously, a genuine guru is always a disciple of the previous guru in the disciplic succession. The guru sees him- or herself only as an instrumental vehicle in transmitting the mercy of God to the disciple.

The language may seem confusing at times. In one sense, as we have already seen, every living being is “part and parcel” of God. It is often expressed in terms of qualitative oneness with God. In other words, every soul is said to be qualitatively one with God. Whatever qualities God possesses, we also possess to some minute degree. Yet God possesses these qualities to an infinite degree. As Prabhupāda says, God has “infinite beauty, infinite wealth, infinite intelligence, infinite humour, infinite kindness, infinite anger and so on” (SB 12.3.43 purport). Between human soul and God, a quantitative difference exists which has to be acknowledged. In other words, even if the guru is to be respected as much as God, this does not mean that the guru should be identified as the Supreme Being, who has all the opulences of God. Only God is Lord and master, the supreme enjoyer; everyone else is a servant.

#### 4.2.3 PRABHUPĀDA’S SPECIAL POSITION

The proper understanding of the guru’s position is nicely illustrated in an essay written by one of Prabhupāda’s disciples that deals with the special position of Prabhupāda himself. Although the position presented in the essay may not be universally held in ISKCON, it illustrates some pertinent issues. In the essay, Prabhupāda is described as an *avatāra*, or incarnation of Kṛṣṇa. It is said that there are two different kinds of *avatāras*. When God himself comes and appears in some form in this world, that is called direct incarnation. When, however, God empowers some living entity to represent him, that is called indirect incarnation. These are living entities who have been given some specific opulence or power by Kṛṣṇa. Now, since Prabhupāda was so spectacularly successful in making people Kṛṣṇa conscious and spreading the chanting of the holy name, it is argued that he must have possessed some special empowerment given by Kṛṣṇa. (Satsvarūpa 1979a, 38.)

Again it is emphasised that Prabhupāda is not Kṛṣṇa but his direct representative. Being an *avatāra* means, however, that “he is not a conditioned soul like us” (Satsvarūpa 1979a, 39). He is said to have been throughout his life always Kṛṣṇa conscious. One should not therefore think that Prabhupāda was an ordinary person until, for instance, meeting his guru and deciding to convert to his cause. No, the devotees should think that Prabhupāda has always been Kṛṣṇa conscious. Such a person is called *nitya siddha* (eternally perfect) (ibid.).

#### 4.2.4 INITIATION

Prabhupāda maintains that to gain liberation it is of utmost necessity that one accepts a spiritual master. It is only through the spiritual master that one gains access to God’s grace. It is understood that one cannot apprehend the spiritual truths of scripture unless one hears them from an authorised spiritual master. In

initiation, the disciple is as if born anew on the spiritual platform; therefore, this is called the second birth. The disciple receives a new, spiritual name denoting a Vaiṣṇava servant (indicated by the suffix *dāsa/dāsī*) as a marker of this new identity.

There are three initiations in ISKCON. The first, the so-called *hari-nāma* initiation, is the formal ceremony through which the disciple and guru acknowledge their mutual commitment to each other and through which the disciple receives the *mahā-mantra* (Kalpapadapa 1999b). The ceremony formally links one to the disciplic succession originating from Kṛṣṇa himself, and descending through Brahmā, Nārada, Vyāsa, Madhva, etc., all the way to the present gurus. The second, brahminical initiation qualifies one to priestly occupation, and it consists of the disciple receiving the *gāyatrī* mantra and the sacred thread. The third initiation is the *sannyāsa* initiation, upon which one embarks on the renounced order of life. This latter initiation is only available for men. At the time of the *sannyāsa* initiation, the disciple receives the title *swami* or *goswami*.

In the *hari-nāma* initiation ceremony, the devotee receives from his or her guru a rosary made of 108 tulasi beads on which the guru has chanted one round. The disciple pledges to chant the *mahā-mantra* 16 rounds of the prayer beads per day. He or she also pledges to follow the four “regulative principles” (no eating of meat, no intoxicants, no gambling, no illicit sex). In theory, these are the only qualifications the devotee has to meet in order to receive the first initiation, besides knowing the rudiments of the theology. In the brahminical initiation, the devotee pledges to chant the *gāyatrī* mantra three times daily, at sunrise, midday and sunset. (Ibid.)

The initiation ceremonies generally include a fire sacrifice performed by a priest or the initiating guru sitting in front of a small fire altar set in the middle of the temple room. The disciples should be appropriately dressed, shaved (men) and marked by the Vaiṣṇava *tilakas* (clay markings). First, they perform purificatory rites as shown by the priest. The initiating guru gives a lecture explaining the meaning of the initiation and chanting. After the lecture, the guru calls upon the disciples and asks them to take their vows, after which he gives them their rosaries and their spiritual names (*hari-nāma* initiation), or the sacred threads and mantras (brahminical initiation). After this, the fire ceremony begins. This consists of an elaborate procedure of offerings made to the fire by the priest, each offering accompanied by appropriate mantras. The disciples are also required to chant certain mantras in front of the fire, repeating after the officiating priest. The ceremony ends with a *kīrtana*, with everyone turning around the fire. The disciples are also required give a gift to the guru, which usually takes place at this point. (Kalpapadapa 1999b; Initiations 2000.)

From the date of initiation, the connection between Kṛṣṇa and the devotee is established. This connection takes place through the spiritual master, who is understood to accept the burden of his or her disciple’s preceding and subsequent sinful reactions (*karma*). The spiritual master is said to “consume” all the sinful

reactions of the disciple (SB 4.21.31 purport). Because the spiritual master must also suffer for sins subsequently committed by the disciple, he or she is advised not to take too many disciples. Thus, it follows that the troubles the spiritual master encounters are not due to his or her own misdeeds.

### 4.3 The guru and the institutional structure of ISKCON

As we have seen, the guru is regarded as an agent of liberation for the disciple. The disciple is expected to treat the guru as if he or she was God. The guru is supposed to be worshipped on an equal level with God, and the disciple should accept all that the guru says as a message coming directly from God. The teachings that the guru gives are thought to represent the absolute truth, and the orders given are to be treated as one's "life and soul". The secret of success in advancing in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is said to lie in absolute obedience to the orders of the guru.

Furthermore, the degree to which one is capable of engaging oneself in the service of the guru is treated as an indication of spiritual advancement. One of the signs of devotees in the intermediate platform (*madhyama-adhikārī*) is that they are capable of being fully engaged in the service of God. In practice, this means that one is employed full-time in the service of ISKCON. Full-time engagement in ISKCON does not mean full-time engagement in solitary chanting and meditating. It means *working* full time for the movement in addition to taking part in temple worship. Together these requirements — absolute obedience and full-time employment — seem to set up a distinctly authoritarian relationship, in which a single leader has fully deployable agents in his or her service.

Although it has been clearly stated that the authority of the guru is strictly circumscribed by scriptural and traditional boundaries, one could still make the case that the scriptural injunctions are quite malleable in the hands of skilful interpreters. Thus, some room for exercise of power exists for the guru.

Studying the teachings alone, one could in fact get an impression of a rather authoritarian organisation. However, Prabhupāda instituted an organisational innovation that changed the picture entirely.

#### 4.3.1 GOVERNING BODY COMMISSION

In 1970, Prabhupāda sensed that some philosophical deviations had crept into the movement. In a letter to one of the disciples, he writes that there is a "great sinister movement" within ISKCON, which has a "poisonous effect" (Prabhupāda 1970a). The letter indicates that some of the disciples had been preaching that Prabhupāda is Kṛṣṇa and that he had withdrawn his mercy from the disciples and other such things. Prabhupāda thought that if the disciples were acting more co-operatively, such poisons would not have the effect of disrupting the movement.

At the same time, Prabhupāda wanted to relieve himself of the administrative responsibilities and devote more time to translating and writing work. By this time, 34 temples were established and there was an acute need to delegate some of the managerial responsibility to his senior disciples. Prabhupāda was already 75 years old and also felt the need to give instruction on how to manage the society in his absence.

For these reasons, Prabhupāda decided to set up an administrative organ for the management of the entire international movement. Thus far, the individual temples had been managed by one president, one secretary and one treasurer who were responsible to Prabhupāda alone. To ensure that the movement would stay united after his departure, Prabhupāda established a collegial body called the Governing Body Commission (GBC), which consisted of twelve senior (male) disciples that he had picked.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of such a collective body was to act as the instrument for the execution of his will (Direction of Management 1970).

The idea for a governing body was not Prabhupāda's own. His own guru, Bhaktisiddhānta Saraswatī, had wanted his disciples to form a similar administrative organ after his departure. However, after Bhaktisiddhānta died in 1937, his disciples were incapable of such co-operation, and the 64 branches of the Gaudiya Math he had instituted split up into competing factions (Ravindra Svarūpa 1994c, 28; Saunaka 1998). Prabhupāda was painfully aware of how this disintegration had seriously hampered the preaching effort and success of the Gaudiya Math. After all, he did not get any support from the Gaudiya Math for his preaching ventures in the West. Prabhupāda was convinced that the pooling of resources and a united effort were key elements of a successful preaching movement. Prabhupāda wanted to ensure ISKCON did not fall into the same trap after his own demise (Ravindra Svarūpa 1994c, 29).

Thus, the GBC was set up in July 1970 to oversee the management of ISKCON under the direction of Prabhupāda. The initial members of the GBC were hand-picked by Prabhupāda, but the plan was that in subsequent years commissioners were to be elected by vote of all temple presidents from a ballot of all temple presidents. Eight new members were to be chosen for a three-year period, while four members would continue their term. The retiring members were to choose the four among themselves. (Direction of Management 1970.)

This was the original vision of Prabhupāda. Things, however, turned out quite differently. The election process did not materialise the way it was initially presented. Instead, Prabhupāda kept picking individuals to the GBC himself. By the summer of 1977, there were 23 commissioners, all male disciples. At that time, Prabhupāda gave new instructions concerning the election process. The chosen commissioners were to remain in office permanently. Competent individuals could, however, still be added to the GBC. No restriction was set on the

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<sup>10</sup> The title "Governing Body Commission" is the title used by the board of directors of Indian Railways (Ravindra Svarūpa 1994b, 28).

number of commissioners. However, the method of selection changed from a democratic to an autocratic one: the GBC would choose its new members by the votes of the present GBC. (GBC Meets 1977; Room Conversations 1977.)

Beginning in 1975, the GBC has held meetings annually in Māyāpur, India. It was Prabhupāda's wish that these meetings would follow a proper parliamentary procedure: bringing proposals to the floor, debating on them and finally voting on them. The proposals that are passed are called "resolutions" and are recorded in the minutes, which are sent to the temple presidents. The enduring statements of law that are passed as resolutions are subsequently collected in the ISKCON Law Book. (Governing Body Commission 1995.)

The GBC is defined as the "supreme managing authority in ISKCON". However, in the Western context, this may give a mistaken impression that it does not deal with religious issues. However, Prabhupāda never separated the material and the spiritual management. Thus, the GBC is also the supreme authority on doctrinal issues in ISKCON.

The intention of Prabhupāda was very clear. He wanted a structure of authority in ISKCON that would ensure that the movement would stay unified (Saunaka 1998). He therefore established an institution that ensured that the senior devotees would decide upon matters collectively. Thus, the "poisons" of different kinds of heresies and other interests would not have a disintegrating effect on the movement. Even if one member became affected, the others would be able to counteract the "poison", and no harm would be done to the movement as a whole.

The foremost principle of this plan was that the GBC would in fact hold supreme authority. It is of great significance that the system stipulates that absolutely everyone in ISKCON is under the jurisdiction of the GBC. In other words, in the absence of Prabhupāda himself, even the gurus are held accountable to the GBC. In contrast to the traditional guru concept in Hinduism, this is a truly remarkable development (Saunaka 1998; Bir Krishna 1999c). In ISKCON, this situation creates a sort of tension: on the one hand, the disciple is supposed to treat his or her guru as equivalent to God in terms of reverence and obedience; on the other hand, the disciple must also accept the idea that an administrative committee monitors the behaviour and teachings of his or her guru and may even set disciplinary measures against the guru.

As one might guess, the passage from Prabhupāda's personal charismatic leadership to routinised GBC leadership has not been altogether smooth. Although the ISKCON "crisis of succession" is worth a study of its own and cannot be fully dealt with here (cf. Gelberg 1991; Ravindra Svarūpa 1994b-c), it is instructive to review the main events after Prabhupāda's demise.

#### 4.3.2 THE CRISIS OF SUCCESSION

The GBC is a significant innovation. The more traditional way to solve the succession crisis in Hindu ascetic organisations is that the leader appoints one of his

disciples as his or her successor. Such a spiritual head of an institution is called *ācārya*.<sup>11</sup> Prabhupāda reserved for himself the title of “Founder-*Ācārya* of the International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness”. The traditional procedure would have been that Prabhupāda appoint his favourite disciple as a successor *ācārya* for ISKCON. This did not happen because Prabhupāda replaced the *ācārya*-system with the GBC. The idea was that in the absence of Prabhupāda, the GBC would collectively be his material and spiritual successor as the head of the entire institution.

The idea was bold and ingenious. The weakness of the traditional successor-*ācārya* system was that very often disciples of the previous *ācārya* would not easily submit themselves to the authority of the appointed disciple. More often they would assume supremacy for their own disciples in their own temples (Saunaka 1998). Thus, the possibility of a large-scale movement continuing, without disintegrating into independent organisations each with their own guru as a supreme authority, was poor. This was the situation Prabhupāda clearly wanted to avoid by instituting the GBC. However, it was precisely what happened after Prabhupāda’s death.

In May 1977, when Prabhupāda’s health had deteriorated markedly, his leading disciples asked him for clarification on the issue of future initiations. In a very significant taped discussion, Prabhupāda stated that he would recommend some of his disciples to “act as officiating *ācārya*”, or “*ṛtvik ācārya*” (GBC Meets 1977). The disciples then wanted to know whose disciples those new initiates would be, i.e. would they be considered Prabhupāda’s disciples or the one’s who is officiating? Prabhupāda replied that they are disciples of his disciple. In other words, the officiating guru would become a “regular guru” (ibid.). There is another taped discussion from July 8, when Prabhupāda actually names eleven men from among the GBC to act as *ṛtvik-gurus* (Room Conversations 1977).

The understanding among the disciples in the summer of 1977 was that Prabhupāda had appointed eleven officiating gurus, who could initiate disciples on Prabhupāda’s behalf while he was still alive, and who would act as regular gurus after Prabhupāda was no longer physically present.

Prabhupāda passed away in November 1977 and by March 1978, the GBC had prepared a statement concerning the process of carrying out subsequent initiations (Governing Body Commission 1978). The statement begins by recapitulating the content of the discussions that took place the previous summer. However, several additional issues were considered in the paper. The first of these is the problem of how to deal with the “delicate” situation of several gurus in the same temple. The statement reads that “[t]he natural way to avoid this is for a guru to perform *dikṣa* in his own zone” (ibid.). The “zones” refer to each *ṛtvik-*

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<sup>11</sup> This is one of several meanings of the term. It is sometimes used in a more general honorific sense. It means “one who practices what one preaches”, and is used by the disciples to honour their guru. (Pradyumna 1978.)

*guru* being assigned a geographical area in which he would perform initiations. The eleven gurus soon became known as “zonal *ācāryas*”.

Secondly, some consideration was given to the issue of guru worship. The statement says that in each temple a special seat (*vyāsāsana*) should be provided for the guru in charge of that territory. Since each temple already had a special *vyāsāsana* for Prabhupāda, on which nobody except Prabhupāda could sit, another seat had to be arranged, a little lower than the one reserved for Prabhupāda, on which nobody except the new guru could sit. A third seat was reserved for the other gurus to sit on. Very soon the new gurus received the same ceremonial worship that was previously accorded to Prabhupāda (Ravindra Svarūpa 1994c, 26; Bhaktivaibhava 1999d).

Thirdly, the question of how new gurus were to be added to the existing group was given consideration. According to the statement, “[t]hose who are already empowered to initiate will extend their number by their consideration. [...] The eleven picked by His Divine Grace will extend themselves.” (Governing Body Commission 1978.) In other words, an extremely autocratic system was set up, in which appointed *ācāryas* were supposed to nominate eligible future gurus, thus dividing their power. The eleven gurus soon formed a special subcommittee within the GBC, which had exclusive power with regard to all issues concerning gurus and initiation (Ravindra Svarūpa 1994c, 26).

The net result of this zonal *ācārya* system was that power shifted decisively from the GBC as a collective entity to these eleven zonal *ācāryas*, who each reigned as supreme authorities in their respective geographical zones. In other words, instead of the GBC being the supreme authority, ISKCON now had not one successor *ācārya* but eleven successor *ācāryas* as supreme authorities (ibid., 29).

It took ten years for ISKCON authorities to figure out how this had occurred. The movement for guru reform began in 1984, when the temple presidents in North America found out in a meeting that almost every one of them held deep misgivings about the present position of gurus in ISKCON. Two of the eleven gurus had already been expelled from ISKCON due to transgressions. It seemed only a matter of time before others would follow. (Ravindra Svarūpa 1994c, 29.)

The problem was described lucidly by Ravindra Svarūpa dāsa in 1985 in a research paper in which he analysed the appointment tapes. In 1984, Ravindra Svarūpa had been assigned the task by the reform movement of preparing a research paper indicating what had gone wrong with the guru succession. His conclusion was that the problem stemmed from conflict between the *ācārya* system and the GBC system, and that only the latter was authorised by Prabhupāda. The disciples had apparently mistaken the *ṛtvik-guru* appointments for *dikṣa-guru* appointments. It should have been obvious for anyone who had read Prabhupāda’s writings that *dikṣa-gurus* cannot be appointed. On the contrary, one becomes a *dikṣa-guru* by *qualifying* as one. However, since one should not

initiate disciples in the presence of one's own guru, Prabhupāda appointed these *ṛtvik-gurus* to officiate on his behalf while he was unable to do so due to illness. (Ravindra Svarūpa 1985.)

To quote Ravindra Svarūpa:

*Ṛtvik-guru* is an office: as Prabhupāda says, “officiating *ācārya*.” But one is *dīkṣa-guru*, in contrast, not by occupation of an office. A *ṛtvik* has powers by virtue of the office conferred upon him, He is qualified by appointment. But one who is “actually guru” (Prabhupāda’s terms) — whether *dīkṣa* or *śikṣā* — is qualified by virtue of his own spiritual realization. [...] Prabhupāda’s *ṛtvik* appointment, therefore, indicated those whom he hoped would be able to become actual gurus; but he did not *appoint* them gurus. (Ibid.)

The reform group headed by Ravindra Svarūpa gained hearing on their position on the matter in the GBC meetings of 1987. By that time, four more gurus had fallen from religious principles. One of them was expelled from ISKCON and the other three were removed from the GBC and suspended as gurus in that same meeting (ISKCON Governing Body Commission 1987). The reform movement put forward two proposals to the GBC. The first was to make the process of receiving authorisation to initiate radically more open. The increase in the number of initiating gurus would soon eliminate the zonal requirement. The second proposal was that there should only be one other *vyāsāsana* in ISKCON temples besides Prabhupāda’s and that any initiating guru could sit on it. Otherwise, the issue of the level of worship of gurus was left to be resolved in the future.<sup>12</sup>

The reforms in the guru position were finally institutionalised in 1995, when the GBC accepted the section of proposals on gurus and initiations in ISKCON made by a GBC subcommittee called “Resolutions and Revision Committee”, which was formed in 1987. According to this new law, a devotee becomes authorised to give initiation if less than three members of the GBC raise objections. The candidate must meet certain spiritual qualifications, which are to be ascertained by a specially formed local council consisting of at least ten senior devotees from the candidate’s preaching area and the local GBC secretaries. If the majority of the council approves the candidate, it sends a letter of nomination to all GBC members, who then have six months to raise any objections. (Governing Body Commission 1995.)

Thus, power was restored to the GBC. It is the GBC that authorises the gurus in ISKCON. Today, there are about 75 initiating gurus in ISKCON and they are fully accountable to the GBC and work under its direction (Suhotra 1999). The GBC monitors the gurus by annual and emergency reports by GBC members. In case of misconduct, the GBC may apply various forms of sanctions, rang-

<sup>12</sup> The standards of guru worship were resolved in the 1999 GBC meetings (see ISKCON Governing Body Commission 1999).



ing from a warning to removal. The ISKCON law states that a guru is to be removed under the following conditions:

If a *guru* becomes openly inimical to Śrīla Prabhupāda or ISKCON; or otherwise acts demonically; or becomes an impersonalist (*māyāvādī*); or preaches the unauthorized philosophy of *apasampradāya* groups against Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s principles; or blatantly and consistently defies ISKCON and GBC policies; or if a *guru*’s attachment to sense gratification is serious, prolonged, or hopeless, then as per *śāstric* injunction, he shall be removed from his position as *śikṣā* or *dīkṣa-guru*. (§ 6.4.5.4.)

#### 4.4 Conclusion

The succession crisis of ISKCON after the demise of Prabhupāda nicely illustrates the tension that was latent in Prabhupāda’s leadership from the very beginning. The process of routinisation in which the autocratic power held by a single charismatic individual gradually becomes invested in rational and bureaucratic institutions is bound to appear in all doctrinal religions sooner or later. However, the tension between charisma and rational procedures was already present in the very nature of Prabhupāda’s approach. As we have seen, charismatic tendencies have a rather limited role in Prabhupāda’s ways of operating.

First of all, Prabhupāda did not teach a novel, personally inspired religious revelation. He was operating within the clear bounds of an existing religious tradition — even if this tradition was not initially known to his first disciples. Prabhupāda was therefore not a full-fledged charismatic leader in the Weberian sense — breaking tradition and claiming complete autonomy.

Secondly, Prabhupāda did not buttress his religious teachings by overt magical claims. He did not produce “signs and wonders” to validate his teachings other than his preaching success — i.e. the numbers of converted. He rested his claims on sheer argumentative force backed up by scriptural evidence. Prabhupāda’s theology formed a highly sophisticated intellectual system and he believed in the simple intellectual persuasiveness of it. His style of rhetoric was therefore more along the lines of a priest or even a professional theologian than a charismatic leader in the Weberian scheme.

Thirdly, Prabhupāda was clearly a very skilful organiser. He set up clear and unambiguous guidelines for his disciples. The institutional structures he created for ISKCON leadership were rational and transparent. It is important to realise that the day-to-day management at any level of the ISKCON structure did not rely on displays of omens and oracles, but on rational procedures. This again is not a characteristic of charismatic leadership in its purest form.

Prabhupāda never identified himself with God and made it very clear that he did not possess the “opulences” associated with God, such as limitless knowl-

edge, limitless power, limitless wealth, etc. The only commodity he claimed to be able to deliver to his disciples was unadulterated knowledge of God, transmitted through authorised disciplic succession. But this was sufficient for achieving salvation. He openly criticised rival gurus for their magical displays and beliefs. Again, this is more a priestly characteristic than prophetic.

And yet his theological doctrine simultaneously contained the notion that one should worship one's guru on an equal level with God. He had exclusive *vyāsāsanas* in every temple; he accepted daily ritualistic worship according to the rules of Hindu *pūjā*; his living quarters in every temple were inviolable sacred grounds; the disciples were supposed to obey his every word and gesture, and accept his teachings as if they were uttered directly by God. One is therefore tempted to think that Prabhupāda's charisma was "constructed" by means of these ritual gestures and paraphernalia. We shall therefore have to explore more fully the nature and significance of ritual life in ISKCON to determine its influence on the perception of Prabhupāda's charisma. This is the subject of the next section.

## SECTION FIVE

# Hindu rituals and cultural models of the guru

The form of Hinduism in which ISKCON practices are rooted is deeply devotional and is part of a *bhakti* movement especially prominent in Bengal. In the *bhakti* tradition, the guru has always been given very prominent theological and ritual expression. Theologically, many movements emphasise that salvation is not possible without the intermediation of the guru; ritually, this has meant that the guru is worshipped on an equal level with God. In ISKCON theology, it is emphasised that while guru is to be worshipped like God, he is not to be equated with God. The guru is not God, only his representative.

Prabhupāda was certainly treated with the utmost deference by his devotees. Devotees were required to offer obeisances every time they entered or left Prabhupāda's presence. However, one needs to keep in mind that obeisances are due to other devotees as well. *Sannyāsīs* are to be offered obeisances at least upon first meeting them during the day. Other devotees can also be offered obeisances upon seeing them for the first time, but this is not considered mandatory. (Bhakti Vikāśa 1994, 84.) Other than these points of etiquette and the ritual requirements, Prabhupāda did not erect an unsurpassable distance between himself and ordinary devotees. No elaborate screening procedures needed to be undertaken in order to meet and talk with him. Thus, ample possibilities existed for all kinds of chance encounters and casual discussions with him.

The structure of the *pūjā* certainly provides the basic idioms for the explicit understanding of the guru-disciple interaction. Every time the deities are offered *pūjā*, one has to begin by worshipping one's guru (in the form of a picture). In addition to this, Prabhupāda was offered *guru-pūjā* in person whenever he happened to be present among the ISKCON temples. A picture or an image of Prabhupāda is used in his absence. On special occasions, such as during his "appearance day" (birthday) celebration or simply when first receiving him in a particular locality, he might also have been offered a more elaborate *pūjā*, which included washing his feet (see Vyasa Puja 1972). Similarly, with regard to other ISKCON gurus today, each initiated disciple is required to offer *pūjā* to his or her guru every day, although this is done privately, not in temples (Bhaktivaibhava

1999; Tattvavada 2001). All these actions derive their meaning from the ritual context of the elaborate tradition of Hindu temple worship. For this reason, it is important to first describe and reflect upon the meaning of these colourful proceedings.

The symbolism encoded in the ritual worship of temple images also forms the foundation of guru worship. The repetitive, standardised schedule of daily worship and the individually suited service for the guru and the movement form the backbone of the Hare Kṛṣṇa devotee's life. Daily worship is common for every ISKCON devotee. It is the primary context within which the guru-disciple interaction takes place.

There are two slightly different aspects to this context. First, the daily rituals provide the most important setting within which the guru is met, both by his disciples and others. In the early days of ISKCON, it was in the lectures, *kīrtanas* and their ritual setting that people first encountered Prabhupāda. Second, the ritual provides the symbolic language for communicating the meaning of the relationship. I shall first discuss the former aspect.

### 5.1. Prabhupāda's daily schedule

The lectures of the gurus given during daily worship are still the primary means by which potential followers get acquainted with spiritual masters in the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. However, it is equally significant that temple worship is not the only context for interaction with the guru in ISKCON. Prabhupāda was remarkable in that he did not make it difficult for people to approach him. In the early days, he was available to his followers and even occasional acquaintances almost around the clock (see Satsvarūpa 1993b). One can gain a good picture of the different contexts in which devotees were able to associate with Prabhupāda by looking at his daily schedule, which he followed rather strictly (Hari Śauri 1992, 52-53):

#### Prabhupāda's daily schedule in 1975

12:00-1:00 – 5:00 a.m.	translation and writing
5:00 – 6:00 a.m.	light rest or chant <i>japa</i>
6:00 – 6:30 a.m.	wash and medicine
6:30 – 7:30 a.m.	morning walk
7:30 – 8:30 a.m.	deity greeting, <i>guru-pūjā</i> , lecture
9:00 – 9:30 a.m.	breakfast
9:45 – 11:15 a.m.	rest and meetings (by appointment)
11:15 – 1:15 p.m.	massage
1:15 – 1:45 p.m.	bath
1:45 – 2:30 p.m.	lunch
2:30 – 3:00 p.m.	sit in room or chant <i>japa</i>

3:00 – 4:00 p.m.	rest
4:00 – 5:00 p.m.	meetings with specific people or devotees
5:00 – 6:30 p.m.	public <i>darśana</i> (audience)
6:30 – 9:30 p.m.	meeting public, or senior devotees, or just chatting
9:30 – 12:00 p.m.	massage and rest

Certain elements of Prabhupāda’s daily routine remained constant throughout his career in the West. He did his translation and writing always during the quiet early morning hours. Then, before the deity greeting, Prabhupāda went for a morning walk, allowing a few people to accompany him. During these walks he would often discuss various philosophical and theological issues with the devotees or friends present. These early morning walks with Prabhupāda were greatly appreciated by the devotees, who would be eager to advance their knowledge. Prabhupāda himself enjoyed arguing against various materialistic views presented to him by devotees. During later years the discussions would invariably be recorded. For the remainder of the day, Prabhupāda would either meet people individually or in public, in addition to regular resting periods, meals and massages. His time would also be filled taking care of various management issues by meeting with senior devotees responsible for the various areas or by correspondence.

For the present context, we can note that a few main categories of interaction contexts with the devotees can be distinguished. First, there is the category of *guru-pūjā*, or ritual worship of the guru. Second are the formal lectures given as part of the temple worship cycles. Third are intimate or semi-casual talks, discussions and interviews on various topics, especially during morning walks or evening meetings. Fourth are management dealings with the devotees he had placed in the positions of authority. Fifth are interactions composed of personal service provided by his secretaries, personal assistants, cooks, masseurs, etc. — in other words, with people who took care of practical matters and personal needs.

In this section, I will focus on the formal, ritual aspect of this interaction, namely, the first two categories. The subsequent sections deal with the more informal side of the interaction, comprising private discussions, group interviews and various management-related dealings. I discuss the ritual side of the interaction first because it also features extensively in the other forms of interaction.

## 5.2 Temple worship in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement

Ritual worship of divine images housed in temples and household altars is a fundamental element of ISKCON spiritual life. While preaching is said to be the essence of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, it is equally often emphasised that preaching would fail if it were not backed up by the purity and spiritual atmosphere generated in regular temple worship. In a letter to one of his senior devo-

tees in 1970, Prabhupāda writes that to make devotional progress, one must maintain the balance between deity worship (*pañcarātriṇa-vidhi*), i.e. offering of articles of worship in a formal and regulated way, and preaching by chanting the holy name and distributing literature (*bhāgavata-vidhi*). He also adds that “[a]lthough chanting is quite sufficient to cover all the Biddhis, still to keep ourselves pure and sanctified, we must observe the rules and regulations of Pancaratriki Biddhi” (quoted in Vedavyāsa 1996, 89). Similarly, Satsvarūpa writes that when performing devotional service, one may sometimes feel that it is very much like worldly activities. One has to conduct business affairs, for instance. This tendency is, however, counteracted by going to the morning devotional programme in the temple and hearing about Kṛṣṇa. Thus, one may acquire a “taste” which is sustained all day (1979, 28-29).

The theological rationale behind the worship of *mūrti* or the material form of God is that it is performed for the benefit of the worshippers themselves, not for God. Kṛṣṇa, the supreme personality of Godhead, cannot be thought of actually being in need of opulent temples or indeed of any kind of service from ordinary people. As Prabhupāda explains: “Kṛṣṇa is the same; He does not require us to dress Him, or to feed Him, etc., but the more I serve by dressing, feeding and caring for Him, He appreciates the service, and I become more Kṛṣṇa Conscious” (Prabhupāda 1968).

It is therefore merely out of mercy that Kṛṣṇa chooses to receive such worship. Kṛṣṇa chooses to appear in the material form of an image because ordinary people cannot see the spiritual form of God with their present senses. Although appearing in a form that our material senses can perceive, the image is not considered material, but spiritual. That is to say, the proper way to approach the *mūrti* of God is to consider it as not different from God himself. Prabhupāda generally called the images “deities” and the process “deity worship”.

Prabhupāda instituted deity worship quite early in his career in the West. In March 1967, less than two years since he had come to the United States, one of his devotees found three curious statues in an import store in San Francisco. When they were shown to Prabhupāda, he was very pleased. The statues were of Jagannātha — a form of Kṛṣṇa worshipped in the famous temple of Purī — his brother Balarāma and sister Subhadrā (Satsvarūpa 1993c, 92). Although the principal deities worshipped by Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas are Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, Jagannātha deities are also worshipped because Caitanya lived in Purī the final years of his life (Gelberg 1989, 161).

Prabhupāda saw that Jagannātha had come to San Francisco by his own accord and he encouraged his disciples to receive and worship him properly. An altar was built into an apartment that was serving as a temple in Haight-Ashbury and a simplified installation ceremony was conducted. Prabhupāda offered incense, candle light, water, cloth and flowers to the deities by circulating them in his hand while ringing a small bell (Hayagrīva 1985, 160). The devotees and guests came one after another and offered a lighted candle in front of the deities

while everyone sang the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* (Satsvarūpa 1993c, 92-99). After the offerings, Prabhupāda explained in lecture that if one wants to go to Kṛṣṇa's heavenly abodes, one has to develop love of Kṛṣṇa. Quoting scriptures, he explained that there are six loving reciprocations by which such love can be recognised: giving and receiving something; offering and accepting something to eat; disclosing one's own mind and listening in response (Hayagrīva 1985, 160).

The worship Prabhupāda instituted at that time was very simple. Devotees were told to present a candle to the deities every time they held *kīrtana*, congregational chanting. Prabhupāda showed them how to wave the candle in circles with a straight hand in front of the deities. Having been offered to the deities, the candle was to be shown to everyone present so that people could pass their hands across the flame and touch their foreheads, and thus, receive blessings. This, in essence is *āratī*, waving of lamps and other auspicious items before an image (or a person). *Āratī* is a traditional Hindu ceremony performed in innumerable temples and homes every day. Now Prabhupāda had managed to teach it to his Western followers. Besides the candle, the devotees were allowed to offer incense and encouraged to bring a fruit and a flower to the temple each time they came (Satsvarūpa 1993c, 100-101).

In October 1968, a new temple was founded in Los Angeles in a rented church building. It was ISKCON's first major temple. It was a self-contained building and not a simple storefront apartment like the other centres. Here one could sing early morning *kīrtanas* without disturbing neighbours (Tamal 1984, 66-67). At this point, Prabhupāda introduced a more regulated form of deity worship, which became a model for all other ISKCON centres (Satsvarūpa 1993d, 8). During the next couple of years regular deity worship was busily being instituted in the dozen or so ISKCON centres in existence (see Bhaktivedanta VedaBase 1999, Letters).

Today, the standard of deity worship is astonishingly high in ISKCON temples around the world. Each major temple has a main altar, on which there are generally three sets of deities: 1) Gaura-Nitāi (a representation of Caitanya and his principal associate Nityānanda), 2) Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and 3) Jagannātha, Balarāma and Subhadrā. The central place is reserved for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. In some temples, however, there may be only one of these sets of deities. In the Helsinki temple, for example, there are approximately 30-cm deities of Gaura-Nitāi on the main altar.

Besides the deities, the standard altar arrangement comprises pictures of prominent personalities in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava lineage (*paramparā*). These include a picture of Caitanya with his principle four associates Nityānanda, Advaita, Gadādhara and Śrīvāsa (*pañca-tattva*, lit. "five principles"); a picture of Nṛsiṃha, a ferocious, lion-headed *avatāra* of Kṛṣṇa; a picture of the six Goswami's of Vṛndāvana (disciples of Caitanya and prominent theologians of the movement); a picture of Prabhupāda and the preceding three gurus: Bhaktisiddhānta Saraswatī Ṭhākura (1874 – 1937) and his guru Gaurakiśora dāsa

Bābājī, and Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura (1838 – 1902). The latter was Bhaktisiddhānta's father and an important Vaiṣṇava reformer and writer. Lastly, the officiating temple priest needs a picture of his or her own guru on the altar during service.

The altar is usually composed of several platforms and the items on it are organised so that the main deity is uppermost. Below the main deity or deities is usually the *pañca-tattva* picture of Caitanya and his associates, and the Nṛsiṃha picture. The picture of the six Goswamis and the four gurus may be on the next lower level. The picture of one's own guru should be placed below all these.

The daily cycle of rituals is also standardised to a high degree, although there are minor variations due to the amount of resources available to deity worship in each temple. With the help of two full-time *pūjārīs*, the deities in the Helsinki temple are worshipped by the following, rather standard schedule<sup>13</sup>:

4:00 a.m.	waking up the deities and offering of sweets
4:30 a.m.	<b><i>maṅgala-āratī</i></b>
5:00 a.m.	<i>ṣoḍaśopacāra-pūjā</i> (worship with 16 items) begins
7:15 a.m.	<b><i>śṛṅgāra-āratī</i></b> (deity greeting), which ends the <i>pūjā</i>
8:15-8:30 a.m.	offering of breakfast
11:30-11:45 a.m.	offering of lunch
5:00 p.m.	offering of evening meal
6:00-6:25 p.m.	<b><i>sandhyā-āratī</i></b>
7:00-8:00 p.m.	deities are clothed in night-dress and put to rest

The three *āratīs* mark the high points in the schedule of worship. They are the only regular daily functions of deity worship performed publicly. During the *āratīs* the whole congregation of devotees may take part in worship and have a *darśana*, a respectful beholding of the deities. The other acts of worship, like offerings of food, dressing, and waking up or putting to rest the deities are performed “in privacy”, that is to say, behind closed curtains by *pūjārīs*, the temple priests.

In addition to the deities on the main altar, two other objects of daily worship are situated in the ISKCON temples. Every morning, immediately after the *maṅgala-āratī*, the tulasī tree is worshipped by the congregation. Tulasī or the sacred basil is a shrub kept by pious Vaiṣṇava families and used in many rituals. The rosary used by Vaiṣṇavas is often made of tulasī. The plant is considered to be the favourite of Kṛṣṇa, who is said to be very fond of its leaves and buds (Bhakti Vikāśa 1994, 48). Secondly, in every temple is a seat (*āsana*) for the *mūrti* of Prabhupāda, which is also worshipped by the congregation daily, immediately after the deity greeting. The seat or altar for the wax or brass image of

<sup>13</sup> This schedule applies to weekdays; the timing is slightly different on Sundays.



Prabhupāda is usually facing the main altar at the opposite end of the temple room.

Other activities that regularly take place in the temple room are individual chanting of the *mahā-mantra* (called *japa*, distinct from congregational chanting called *kīrtana*) and classes on sacred scriptures. Every morning a class is held on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*), and in the evenings, on *Bhagavad-gītā*. These works are the principle scriptural authorities for the entire Vaiṣṇava tradition (Gelberg 1989, 137). In ISKCON, two other scriptures are also held authoritative: a Bengali biography of Caitanya by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja called *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, and a Sanskrit theological treatise *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, written by Rūpa Goswami, a disciple of Caitanya (Prabhupāda's English summary study of it used in ISKCON is entitled *Nectar of Devotion*). The formal reading and discussion in classes is always based on Prabhupāda's translations and commentaries of these works.

Each of these activities takes place at a specified time in the temple. All morning activities are considered obligatory for devotees. So, from the point of view of the congregational devotees (as opposed to *pūjārīs*), the highly routinised daily programme can be summarised as follows:

The morning programme (obligatory)

4:30 a.m.	<i>maṅgala-ārati</i>
5:00 a.m.	<i>tulasī-ārati</i>
5:10 a.m.	<i>japa</i> -period
7:15 a.m.	deity greeting
7:25 a.m.	Śrīla Prabhupāda <i>guru-pūjā</i>
7:45-8:30 a.m.	<i>Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam</i> -class

The evening program (optional)

6:00-6:25 p.m.	<i>sandhyā-ārati</i>
6:30 p.m.	<i>Bhagavad-gītā</i> -class

In the following, I shall describe the morning programme in more detail as it is typically performed in ISKCON temples today. The description is a composite picture based on literature, interviews, participant observation and videotaped recordings of worship in numerous ISKCON temples in Scandinavia, Belgium, and India (cf. GBC Deity Worship 1994a-b; Diwali 1997; 1999; Kalpapadapa 1999a; Morning Programme 2000; Narasimha 2000). The description is done mainly from the point of view of the congregation, but in order to fully understand the proceedings, I shall also give simplified descriptions of the *ārati* ceremony (*maṅgala-ārati*) and the main *pūjā* from the viewpoint of the *pūjārīs*. The reason for this is that these rituals are rich in symbolic significance, which one needs to know to fully grasp the point of these proceedings.

### 5.3 The morning programme

#### 5.3.1 MAṄGALA-ĀRATĪ

Before going to the deity room, the *pūjārī* offers obeisances by bowing down on the floor and reciting a mantra for his or her guru. Obeisances are offered by prostrating on the ground or by kneeling so that the lower legs, head and the forearms touch the ground. Theologically, all offerings made to the supreme God have to go via the guru, therefore, one has to recite prayers addressed to one's guru (*praṇāma* mantra) when bowing down to the deities (Bhakti Vikāśa 1994, 83).

Next, the *pūjārī* performs *ācamana*, a ritual of purification. With his left hand, the *pūjārī* takes a small spoonful of water from a special cup. A small drop is put in the right hand and the *pūjārī* swallows it. The procedure is done three times, each time reciting a short mantra. The *ācamana* cup is used throughout the *āratī* to purify the hands and also the objects to be offered.

After purifying himself, the *pūjārī* purifies a blowing conch, which is kept outside the deity room. It is then taken in the right hand and blown three times to make a sound that marks the beginning of the ceremony. The conch and the hand are purified again and then the *pūjārī* steps into the deity room. From inside the deity room, the *pūjārī* opens the curtains while ringing a small bell in his left hand. Thus, the deities are revealed to the congregation waiting in the temple room.

*Āratī* is offered standing on a grass mat on the left side of the altar (as viewed from the temple room). First, the *pūjārī* purifies the incense by dropping three drops of water at the base and then he lights it. Both the hands and the bell are then purified. The incense is picked up in the right hand and the bell in the left. Before the articles can be offered to the deity, they must be shown to the picture of one's guru and all the *paramparā* gurus whose pictures are on the altar. By reciting appropriate mantras while showing the incense, the *pūjārī* asks permission of the lineage of gurus to present the offered item to the deities. The rationale behind this operation is again that, one should not approach Kṛṣṇa directly, bypassing one's seniors. All the offerings must first be shown to one's own guru, who then presents it to his guru and so on all the way up to Kṛṣṇa, who is believed to have originated the lineage.

After the permission of the lineage gurus has thus been obtained, the incense is finally offered to the deities. This is done by waving the incense in seven circles in a clockwise direction before the deity. After the incense has been offered to the main deity, it is offered as *prasāda* (gift of blessing) to the other deities and pictures of gurus on the altar in descending order, finishing with one's own guru.

Altogether there are seven items to be offered to the deity in this fashion. They are offered in fixed order as follows:

- 1) incense
- 2) ghee lamp
- 3) water in conch
- 4) handkerchief or cloth
- 5) flowers
- 6) *cāmara* (whisk)
- 7) peacock fan

Each item has a specified number of circles to be waved, the ghee lamp being the most complex. The *cāmara* and the peacock fan are offered by simply waving them in front of the deities. The fan is not to be used in winter, when the cooling effect is inappropriate. After the offerings, the *pūjārī* again purifies his hand.

Everything that has been offered to the deity becomes sanctified and can be offered as a gift of blessing, *prasāda*. After the ghee lamp is offered, it is given over the fence to a devotee in the temple room who takes it to show to the deity of Pabhupada at the other end of the temple room. Then it is shown to all devotees present in the temple, again starting with the most senior members present, then other male devotees and finally the female devotees. Everyone takes the opportunity to pass their fingers over the flames and touch their foreheads or eyelids to honour the *prasāda*.

The water that has been offered is poured into a small cup, from which it is poured into the hand and sprinkled over the congregating devotees. This can be done by the *pūjārī* from inside the deity room or the cup may be given to someone in the temple room. After the flowers have been offered, some are placed at the feet of the deities on the altar and others are given to the devotees. The devotees sniff the flower, or sometimes touch their head with it, and pass it on to others.

When each item has been offered, the *pūjārī* comes out of the deity room and again blows the conch three times. As a last item, the *pūjārī* then offers some scented oil to the deities by dipping a cotton swab in it. The cotton swab is in turn given to the devotees as *prasāda*. Someone goes around and touches the cotton on the back of devotees' hands so that it can be smelled. To conclude, the *pūjārī* removes the *āratī* paraphernalia from the deity room and offers prostrated obeisances outside the deity room.

### 5.3.2 TEMPLE ROOM ACTIVITIES DURING MAṄGALA-ĀRATĪ

When the *pūjārī* blows into the conch shell to mark the beginning of the *āratī*, the congregation gradually gathers into the temple room. People keep arriving long after the ceremony has begun. The *pūjārīs* start the ritual punctually, regardless of who or how many people are present.

Prompted by the lead singer, the congregation in the temple room starts singing softly “Jaya Gaura-Nitāi, Jaya Gaura-Nitāi” in praise of the presiding deities of Gaura-Nitāi. Two instruments are generally used while singing *kīrtana*: *karatālas* are small brass hand cymbals, and *mṛdaṅga* is a tubular clay drum encased in a cloth-bag. Early morning singing is generally done more quietly than during the rest of the ceremony. While singing, everyone is standing and slowly swaying from side to side.

When the *pūjārī* opens the curtains to reveal the deities, men offer full prostrations and women kneel and touch their head to the floor. Everyone murmurs prayers to their guru. The only light comes from the brightly lit altar, while the temple room itself is kept dark, creating a distinctive atmosphere by de-emphasising the congregating devotees as compared with the glimmering and colourful deities. The deities have just been woken up and offered some sweets before the *āratī* begins, and they are still in their night-dresses. Symbolically, seeing such dignified figures at such an intimate moment signifies a rare privilege and a close relationship.

Standing up again, everyone sings a hymn glorifying the guru, *Śrī Śrī Gurv-aṣṭaka*. The various Sanskrit hymns and mantras are sung in antiphonal style. The lead singer starts the song by singing the first line, “*samsāra-dāvānala-līḍha-loka-trāṇāya kārūṇya-ghanāghanatvam*”, and the congregation repeats it. Translated into English, the first two verses of this song are:

The spiritual master is receiving benediction from the ocean of mercy. Just as a cloud pours water on a forest fire to extinguish it, so the spiritual master delivers the materially afflicted world by extinguishing the blazing fire of material existence. I offer my respectful obeisances unto the lotus feet of such spiritual master, who is an ocean of auspicious qualities.

Chanting the holy name, dancing in ecstasy, singing, and playing musical instruments, the spiritual master is always gladdened by the saṅkīrtana movement of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Because he is relishing the mellows of pure devotion within his mind, sometimes his hair stands on end, he feels quivering in his body, and tears flow from his eyes like waves. I offer my respectful obeisances unto the lotus feet of such a spiritual master. (GBC Deity Worship 1994a, 283.)

The song has eight verses, all glorifying the guru, and it takes awhile to sing it. Meanwhile, the *pūjārī* offers the ghee lamps to the deities and hands them over to the congregation as *prasāda*.

Then the *praṇāma* mantra of Prabhupāda is chanted. This is translated as follows:

I offer my respectful obeisances unto His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, who is very dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa, having taken shelter at His lotus feet.

Our respectful obeisances are to you, O spiritual master, servant of Sarasvatī Goswami. You are kindly preaching the message of Lord Caitanya-deva and delivering the Western countries, which are filled with impersonalism and voidism. (Rohini Nandan [n.d.], 2.)

The salutation to Prabhupāda is followed by the *Pañca-tattva mahā-mantra* and the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*: Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare / Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare. By the time the *mahā-mantra* is begun, the *pūjārī* has offered water to the deities, and this is also being sprinkled on everyone present as *prasāda*. The *mahā-mantra* is sung until the *pūjārī* is finished with the offerings. In conclusion, “Jaya Prabhupāda” and “Jaya Gaura-Nitāi” are sung again.

When the singing ends, everyone kneels and touches their head on the floor while a senior devotee recites a litany of prayers glorifying significant objects of veneration in the movement. The litany of glorification includes a number of important *paramparā* gurus, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, cowherd boys and girls, holy places and rivers, the tulasī tree, other Vaiṣṇavas, *saṅkīrtana*, sacred scriptures, present gurus in ISKCON and the assembled devotees. These *prema-dhvani* prayers can be translated as “All glories to [so-and-so]”. To each prayer, the congregation responds with “jaya!” (‘victory’). After this, everyone again murmurs one's own *praṇāma* prayers.

After the prayers, everyone sits on the floor and starts singing a song and a prayer addressed to Nṛsimha. At this time, the perfume is offered as *prasāda*. As the song ends, the *pūjārī* closes the curtains to the deity room, and the congregation again offers obeisances.

### 5.3.3 MAIN WORSHIP WITH SIXTEEN ITEMS

Immediately after the *maṅgala-āratī* ends, the *pūjārī* prepares for the main *pūjā* of the day. The curtains of the deity room are closed, and thus, the deity room and the temple room activities are separated. While the congregation worships the tulasī tree or chants *japa*, the *pūjārī* worships the deity. During this ritual sixteen items of worship (*upacāra*) are offered to the deity. These sixteen items can be classified into four categories: reception of the deity, bathing and dressing the deity, worshipping the deity and concluding activities. The items are listed in the following table in the order of offering:

#### A. Reception

- 1) A seat (*āsana*) is offered to the deity by a hand gesture
- 2) Welcoming (*svāgata*); the deity is greeted with joined palms

- 3) Water for washing the feet (*padya*); this traditionally contains lotus petals, tulasī leaves, darbha grass and a certain grain, but rose water may also be used
- 4) Water for sprinkling on the head (*arghya*); the *arghya* water contains auspicious ingredients (white rice, yoghurt, milk, flowers and such) mixed with water
- 5) Water for sipping (*ācamana*).
- 6) Refreshment (*madhuparka*), consisting of auspicious ingredients such as yoghurt, honey and ghee
- 7) Water for sipping (*punar-ācamana*)

#### B. Bathing and dressing

- 8) Bathing (*snāna*); the deity is cleansed, rubbed with a paste and bathed by pouring water over it
- 9) Clothing (*vastra*); the deity is clothed in fresh clothes
- 10) Ornaments (*alankara*); the deity is decorated with beautiful ornaments

#### C. Worship

- 11) Sandalwood paste (*gandha*) is applied to the feet, hands and head of the deity
- 12) Flowers (*puṣpa*) or flower petals are offered to the feet of the deity
- 13) Incense (*dhūpa*)
- 14) Ghee or camphor lamp (*dīpa*)
- 15) Food offering (*naivedya*)

#### D. Concluding activities

- 16) Offering of respects (*praṇāma*); these include silent chanting of mantras, worshipping various paraphernalia of the deity, other offerings, prayers and acts of worship, offering obeisances, accepting the remnants of the food offered to the deity and — most importantly — the *darśana-āratī* (deity greeting). During the *darśana-āratī* the circumambulation of the deities is also recommended where possible (in practice, this is only possible in a few ISKCON temples). (GBC Deity Worship 1994a, 75-125.)

The same principle of hierarchy is observed in the main *pūjā* as in every *āratī*: all items are first offered to the guru, then to Caitanya and finally to the main deity. However, distinct from the procedure in *āratī*, here all sixteen offerings have to be made before moving on to worship the next person in hierarchy, starting the cycle from the beginning. When offering the items to (the pictures of) the guru and Caitanya, they may be substituted by flower petals dipped in a special paste or *arghya* water (GBC Deity Worship 1994a, 200).

This description of the ritual covers only the bare essentials of a very complex ritual including various preparatory activities, purifications and preliminary worship. Each cycle of offerings is preceded by meditations and mental offerings. Each offering is accomplished by reciting complex mantras (see GBC Deity Worship 1994a for details).

There are various standards to which the *pūjā* may be performed. The one with sixteen *upacāras* is recommended in public temples (GBC Deity Worship 1994a, 74). If there are zealous, well-trained, and enthusiastic devotees, an even more elaborate standard may be established, including up to 64 *upacāras* offered during the day (GBC Deity Worship 1994b, 57). In smaller temples and homes, the standard may be lowered to 12 (omitting bathing, dressing and decorating), 10 (also omitting the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> items) or 5 (also omitting all the reception items) *upacāras* (GBC Deity Worship 1994a, 74).

As indicated in the list, the *darśana-āratī* beginning at 7:15 a.m. ends the *pūjā*. Belonging to the 16<sup>th</sup> item (*praṇāma*), the *āratī* is conceived of as a respectful offering of obeisances to the deity.

#### 5.3.4 TULASĪ PŪJĀ

The tulasī *pūjā*, performed by the congregating devotees, also begins immediately after *maṅgala-āratī*. A prayer addressed to tulasī is chanted while the plants are being prepared for worship and everyone is still kneeling. Two tulasī plants are carried from the corner to the centre of the temple room, a few metres apart from each other — men and women worship their own plants. After the prayers, everyone stands up and the lights are put on in the temple room.

The plants are on high stands so that the offerings may be made while standing. One of both the men and the women then offer *āratī* to the plant. The ritual implements are on a small table beside the plant and the devotees offering *āratī* stand on a small mat made of kusa grass. *Āratī* offerings include incense, the ghee lamp and a flower. As a last item, everyone present puts a drop of water into the flower pot. During the watering, the congregation circles the plant in a clockwise direction.

During the *āratī* a song glorifying tulasī is sung, and after that, the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* is chanted. Harmonium and *Karatālas* may be played to accompany the singing. After the *āratī* is over, everyone again kneels to the floor, reciting prayers. People then sit down and someone reads a short passage from the *Nectar of Devotion*. Next, a list of ten offences against the holy name is chanted, either collectively or each chanted by a different person. Then the temple authorities may make some practical announcements for the day. Finally, everyone kneels down for prayers and the programme ends. *Maṅgala-āratī* and tulasī *pūjā* together take about three-quarters of an hour.

### 5.3.5 JAPA PERIOD

During the time of initiation the Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees vow to chant 16 rounds of prayer beads (*japa-mālā*) daily. One *japa-mālā* consists of the standard 108 beads tied in a loop. The practice consists of the chanting of one *mahā-mantra* per bead aloud. The beads are kept in a special bead bag that is hung around the neck. The counting of beads is done with the right hand, using the thumb and the middle finger. The index finger is considered impure and there is a hole in the bead bag so that it can be kept outside.

To chant the *mahā-mantra* all 1 728 times takes about two hours, and it is recommended that the chanting be done at the specified period in the morning. A distinctive atmosphere is created in the temple by the effect of many devotees chanting simultaneously, but not in unison. Some people chant sitting and others may walk around. Each is absorbed in one's own chanting.

While chanting one should concentrate on hearing the sound. The mantra is considered to be a sound incarnation of Kṛṣṇa, and thus, extremely beneficial for all to hear.

### 5.3.6 DEITY GREETING

The *japa* period finishes by 7:00 a.m. and people have again gathered in the temple room. The *pūjārī* blows the conch shell three times beside the deity room door and then opens the deity room curtains. As the curtains open to reveal the deities in full dress, decoration and royal regalia, everyone offers obeisances. A beautiful song, actually a few lines from *Brahma saṁhitā* describing the transcendental form of Kṛṣṇa, is played from a tape. Ringing a bell in the left hand, the *pūjārī* offers *ārati* to the deities. A flower is offered to the congregation as *prasāda*. Everyone stands still, listening to the song with folded hands or softly singing along.

If the deities have been bathed during the *pūjā*, the liquids used in the process combined with sweetened yoghurt are offered to the devotees to taste. This is called *caraṇāmṛta*. From a special bowl, each devotee is offered three drops of the precious liquid as they line up to receive it.

The conch is then blown again three times and people offer obeisances. The song fades away.

### 5.3.7 ŚRĪLA-PRABHUPĀDA GURU-PŪJĀ AND KĪRTANA

People turn around and change sides. Śrīla Prabhupāda *guru-pūjā* begins. A senior devotee puts a garland of flowers on the *mūrti* (image) of Prabhupāda (now that he is physically absent) and leads the singing: “Jaya Prabhupāda, jaya Prabhupāda, jaya Prabhupāda”, offering prostrations before the *āsana*. Then others offer flowers. Everyone picks some petals from a tray and after circling them in the hand before the image, drops them before the *āsana*. After this, full obeisances are offered on the floor, sideways to the *āsana* so that their feet do not point to the main altar. Many people do this simultaneously.



The *ārati* commences as the officiating priest blows the conch shell. A Bengali song called *Śrī Guru-vandanā* is begun. In translation, the song goes as follows:

The lotus feet of our spiritual master are the only way by which we can attain pure devotional service. I bow down to his lotus feet with great awe and reverence. By his grace one can cross over the ocean of material suffering and obtain the mercy of Kṛṣṇa.

My only wish is to have my consciousness purified by the words emanating from his lotus mouth. Attachment to his lotus feet is the perfection that fulfills all desires.

He opens my darkened eyes and fills my heart with transcendental knowledge. He is my lord birth after birth. From him ecstatic *prema* emanates; by him ignorance is destroyed. The Vedic scriptures sing of his character.

Our spiritual master is the ocean of mercy, the friend of the poor, and the lord and master of the devotees. O Master! Be merciful unto me. Give me the shade of your lotus feet. Your fame is spread all over the three worlds. (GBC Deity Worship 1994a, 287.)

Meanwhile the *pūjārī* offers incense, a lamp, water, cloth, a flower and a whisk by waving them before the image. *Karatālas* and *mṛdaṅga* are played, and people start dancing and perhaps clapping their hands. The *pūjā* ends with Prabhupāda's *praṇāma* mantras, then everyone turns again towards the main altar and starts singing *Pañca-tattva mahā-mantra*. *Pūjārī* cleans the area and takes the ritual implements away.

The chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* begins. Usually this is the most jubilant *kīrtana* of the morning programme. At first the tempo is slow. People take slow steps back and forth to the rhythm while singing. Gradually, the tempo picks up and people take more complex dance steps. Some raise their hands above their heads, palms upward in a gesture of rejoice and surrender.

During the *kīrtana* the dance steps vary considerably in intensity from time to time and place to place. At the beginning of the service, the dancing is usually just swaying slowly from side to side, shifting the weight from one leg to another and clapping hands to the rhythm of the song. Usually the intensity and tempo of singing and the complexity of the dances build up gradually. The most general form of dancing consists of small sideways kicks, flexing one knee slightly as the other leg goes in front of it. In another version, one jumps slightly in the air while the other leg is swaying. Another small jump comes just before switching legs. Mostly, this is as far as it goes during a low-key *kīrtana*. On some occasions, however, the intensity of the *kīrtana* goes considerably further.

Usually people do the movements simultaneously in the same direction and some dance steps are done in groups. Women and men are on their own sides of the temple room (facing the altar, women in the Helsinki temple are on the right and men on the left) and form their own groups independently. One of the less intensive forms of group dancing involves a few steps forward and backward between the changing of feet. When someone starts doing this, others usually join in and soon the whole congregation is moving back and forth simultaneously. As the enthusiasm escalates, people may start turning around at the one end and walk speedily, knees slightly bent, clapping hands.

Another common dance begins by forming a circle so that everyone is facing the centre while walking alternately backwards and forwards. When everyone does this simultaneously, the circle closes in and enlarges in rhythm. When sideways steps are also taken, the circle starts going around. When intensity builds up, people may join hands or grab each other's shoulders in the circle formation. In an even more intensive version, devotees may one at a time step inside one of these circles and start whirling around rapidly or doing some other spontaneous and complex dances, while others cheer.

Another intensive group formation is one in which people grab the shoulders of another person from the back so that a long queue of people is formed. These queues may then start moving around the temple room.

When the intensity of the singing and dancing peaks, the group formations tend to break up and people turn again towards the deity and raise their hands, palms upward, and start jumping up and down as high as they can on both legs, no longer caring whether they maintain the rhythm. The more complex forms of dancing thus break up into a chaos of jumping bodies. Loud shrieks may be heard. Not everyone exhibits such intensity, of course, and generally women exhibit less extravagant gestures than men.

When the *kīrtana* finally ends, everyone kneels down, touches their head on the floor and recites the *prema-dhvani* prayers again.

### 5.3.8 BHĀGAVATAM LECTURE

Considering that preaching is deemed the essence of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, the daily lecture takes up only a relatively small part of the morning programme. The lecture starts at about 7:45 a.m., more than three hours after the morning programme has begun. Chanting, dancing and worshipping consume considerably more time and emotion than the relatively sober lecture lasting about three-quarters of an hour. The lecture is based quite strictly on the sacred scriptures and Prabhupāda's commentaries on them.

This might lead one to conclude that intellectual content has a relatively minor role in the movement. This, however, is not the case. It is quite significant that Prabhupāda gave priority to the intellectual content of the sacred scriptures, and not to the colourful rituals and the religious experiences produced by them. His translation and commentary on the *Bhagavad-gītā* is titled *Bhagavad-gītā As*

*It Is*, emphasising that he is commenting and interpreting it literally. The same principle applies to *Bhāgavatam*. All the books include the original Sanskrit verse in devanagari script, its transliteration, a word for word translation and the complete prose translation of the verse. After each translated verse is a section entitled “purport”, in which Prabhupāda interprets and amplifies the meaning of the verse in question. The purports may occasionally be rather lengthy — sometimes a couple of pages or more.

When the lecture begins, everyone takes a seat on the floor, facing the *vyāsāsana*, the seat of the lecturer. This is positioned sideways with regard to the altar so that neither lecturer nor audience has to turn their backs to the altar. The volume of scripture studied is placed on a stand in front of the lecturer’s seat. The stand should be sufficiently high that the book is always above the level of the seat (GBD Deity Worship 1994a, 248). Quite often, especially when the lecturer is a senior devotee, *sannyāsī* or guru, he is given a garland of flowers around the neck when he is seated. Sometimes the lecturer leads a short *kīrtana* before beginning the lecture (including Prabhupāda *praṇāma* mantra, *pañca-tattva mahā-mantra*, Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* and *prema-dhvani* prayers). The class proper begins with a song called *Jaya Rādhā-Mādhava*, describing Kṛṣṇa as an inhabitant of the groves of Vṛndāvana, and an invocation to *Bhāgavatam*, lead by the lecturer (*om namo bhāgavate vāsudavāya*). Either the lecturer or someone from the audience may play the harmonium, the *karatālas* or the *mṛdaṅga*. (See e.g. Hridayananda 1998a-b; Morning Programme 2000.)

The morning lectures are always on *Bhāgavatam* and each day’s lecture is based on one or two verses. With every day moving on to subsequent verses, the entire massive text of some 18 000 verses is gradually covered over the years. Each day’s verse is written on a blackboard beside the lecture seat. It is first recited word for word in Sanskrit. For example, let’s say the day’s verse happens to be the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> verses of the 22<sup>nd</sup> chapter of the 8<sup>th</sup> canto (SB 8.22.29-30):

*kṣīṇa-rikthas cyutaḥ sthānāt*  
*kṣipto baddhas ca śatrubhiḥ*  
*jñātibhiś ca parityakto*  
*yātanām anuyāpitaḥ*

*guruṇā bhartsitaḥ śapto*  
*jahau na suvrataḥ*  
*chalair ukto mayā dharmo*  
*nāyam tyajati satya-vāk*

The lecturer chants “*kṣīṇa*” and everyone responds “*kṣīṇa*”, to be continued by “*rikthas*”, etc., throughout the entire verse. Next, the lecturer chants each line of the verse at a time, everyone repeating after him. This is repeated twice. Then it is time for two or three male devotees in the audience, in turn, to lead the

chanting. The lecturer then signals for some of the female devotees to lead the chanting. Thus the devotees learn to pronounce the Sanskrit verses properly. (See Morning Programme 2000.)

When this is over, the lecturer chants again each word of the verse, everyone repeating it, and then giving the translation for the word, which everyone also repeats. The lecturer reads the entire translation and purport by Prabhupāda aloud from the book. Only after this does the lecturer begin the lecture proper, elaborating on the themes found in both the verse and Prabhupāda's purport.

The elaboration may stray in an associative fashion quite far from the issues of the verse itself. Time, place and current circumstances of the audience are often skilfully taken into consideration. Sometimes the lecturers may develop a philosophical point in detail. At other times, the lecturer may start to relate some other story from the sacred literature in colourful detail.

Finally, the lecturer opens the floor to questions. The questioning should be done submissively and with proper etiquette, not to challenge the lecturer. Again, a long period of discussion on some point may develop. Other times, there may be few questions. After there are no more questions the lecturer ends, usually with some glorifications: "Śrīla Prabhupāda ki jaya!, Śrī Śrī Gaura-Nitāi ki jaya! Gaura-premanande Hari haribol!" The audience bows down and answers to each by shouting "jaya!" Someone from the audience may shout glorification for the current lecturer: "[lecturer's name] ki jaya!" to which everyone responds with "jaya!" Finally everyone murmurs the *praṇāma*-mantras audibly. The temple president may then make some announcements, after which people leave for breakfast.

#### **5.4 The feelings evoked**

Looking at these ritual proceedings from the viewpoint of emotion, we can now make some observations. The ritual life in ISKCON is exceedingly routinised; the standard rituals take place on a daily basis according to a strict schedule and tight norms of behaviour. It is therefore quite understandable that these rituals do not generally produce climactic, exceptional "peak experiences" or anything resembling altered states of consciousness or mystical trances. Prabhupāda's expression in which he likened the experience produced in the deity worship to "taste" is therefore very revealing. In fact, it is part of the standard jargon of the movement to talk of the temple worship in terms of the "taste" it gives. The remarkable feature of this "taste" is that it is said to "sustain one's service" throughout the rest of the day. Prabhupāda was fairly explicit in his pronouncements that the arduousness of preaching work could not be sustained without the bolstering effect of deity worship. Translated into Damasio's terms, what we have is a case of 'background feeling' that the devotees take notice of and value as a product of daily participation.

We can also observe that the feelings evoked in the ritual routines are based on a complex choreography of different emotional cues. The first and most prominent set consists of love, affection, admiration and, very likely, longing, as evidenced in the attitude the devotees take towards the deities on the altar. Secondly, these feelings of loving affection are always combined with some subtle dimension of fear, apprehension and submissiveness, as manifested in the numerous prostrations during the ritual and the meticulous care taken to avoid any “offensive” acts. Thirdly, there is a set of moods consisting of joy, happiness, festivity and rejoicing that are unmistakably evoked by the dancing and singing. Finally, in stark contrast to the festive mood of *kīrtana* is the sober, grave and dryish classroom mood of the daily lecture.

It is very likely that by regularly participating in all these mood-provoking activities one is left with a sense of calm contentment, a slight elevation in mood and a mild sense of well-being. The rituals are rather demanding physically and can be compared with regular exercise work-outs. Such a background feeling of a healthy sense of vigour and freshness can indeed be likened to a delicious taste.

### 5.5 The meaning of *pūjā*

We are now in a position to analyse the meaning of these ritual proceedings. First, one must consider the explicit, more or less consciously held interpretations the devotees have on these proceedings. What do the devotees themselves think they are doing? Having analysed this, one may go further still and look at the specifically Indian and Hindu cultural ideas that can be deciphered behind the observed patterns of action. The purpose of this analysis is to prepare the ground for questioning to what extent the representations of guru in ISKCON can actually be explained as simply part of the Indian culture.

Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami, striving to present “the real transcendental meaning of the temple in terms of the devotees, the Supreme Lord and devotional service” gives us a good starting point (Satsvarūpa 1979b, 5). He writes that “[t]he temples of Kṛṣṇa in India are like kings’ palaces, and the Supreme Lord who is staying there in the Deity form is considered to be the proprietor” (ibid.). Prabhupāda also compares deities to kings in the *Nectar of Devotion*: “Actually, in India the temples are just like royal palaces. They are not ordinary buildings, because the worship of Kṛṣṇa should be performed in just the way that a king is worshiped in his palace.” (Prabhupāda 1970b.)

That the deity in the temple is associated with a king in his palace is also quite evident in the ritual proceedings. The *pūjārīs* behave as though they were the most intimate servants of some royal family in serving the deities. In bringing their meals, seats and refreshments to them, and bathing, dressing and decorating them, the *pūjārīs* act as menial servants of important and powerful high-status persons. Fanning the deities with the yak-tail whisk and the peacock fan certainly

add to the royal atmosphere in the temple. Also the congregation, by singing and dancing in front of them, could be seen as expressing the feelings of cheering subjects of a victorious, famous and powerful king. Alternatively, the singing and dancing could be interpreted as a sort of court entertainment.

A number of scholars of Indian religion have attempted an interpretation of the meaning of *pūjā* (see Gonda 1970; Babb 1975; Fuller 1992; Milner 1994; Eck 1998). As C. J. Fuller (1992, 57) puts it, *pūjā* is “the core ritual of popular theistic Hinduism”. Evidence also shows that all *pūjā* rituals share the same basic structure (ibid., 66). Therefore, its meaning for Hindus in general is of great significance.

All commentators agree that *pūjā* is essentially an act of respectful honouring. Jan Gonda (1970, 77) has emphasised that *pūjā* is an invocation, reception and entertainment of God as a royal guest. However, as both Diana Eck (1998, 47) and Fuller (1992, 69) point out, a more personal and affectionate aspect also exists. Besides kings, Gods are also likened to honoured guests and the worship closely resembles the acts that ordinary people perform for guests visiting their home. As Fuller puts it: “[r]espectful honouring is the first meaning and purpose of worship, but it elaborates the hospitality of the home as much as the grandeur of the palace ...” (1992, 69).

Murray Milner Jr. (1994, 172-188) has interpreted Hindu worship in terms of status process. He points out that much of what happens in worship is modelled after relationships between people of unequal status (ibid., 172). Milner argues that worship can be divided into three processes, all of which are explicable in terms of status process: 1) making oneself and one’s immediate context worthy of the deity’s presence; 2) praising and deferring to the deity; 3) coming into intimate contact with the deity, which can lead to either rejection or communion (ibid., 174).

The first phase of the worship is often expressed in terms of purity and cleanliness in Hinduism. As I tried to indicate in the description of the *pūjā*, the act is characterised by constant emphasis on purification, both of the worshipper and the items used in the worship. The physical place and all the items that are expected to come into contact with the deity are meticulously kept ritually pure by sprinkling them with purified water and not allowing them to come into contact with objects that are already used in offering. Purification itself is acquired by two different means, either by removing pollution or by coming into contact with things and substances that are considered purifying (e.g. ghee, sandalwood paste, tulasī plant). As Milner emphasises, the point is not that the deity is in danger of becoming polluted but that impurity in the presence of the deity is a sign of disrespect (ibid. 176).

The second element, deferring, praising and glorifying the deity is evident throughout the morning programme of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. The singing of devotional prayers and songs and dancing to entertain the deity, performing *ārati*,

offering flowers and ornaments to the deity, possibly circumambulating the deity and so on, are all explicitly understood to be done in glorification of God.

The third fundamental element of worship is that of association and communion with the deity. The successful performance of worship is understood to cause transformation in the worshipper. In Hindu *pūjā*, this intimate association is most commonly expressed in the deity and the devotee sharing food. The idea is always the same: the deity is given food, it is taken back and distributed among the worshippers as *prasāda*. However, it is not simply food that is offered as *prasāda*. As we have seen, all the items offered to the deity, such as ghee lamps, flowers, water and perfume, become sanctified and are distributed to devotees. The mere act of seeing the deities is considered to bring blessing to the devotee. This casting one's eyes on the deity, an exchange of vision, is called *darśana*, and it is considered to be a form of communication with the deity. Any intimacy with the deity has the power to transform the devotee and is therefore greatly desired. (Ibid., 179-185.)

Sharing food is, of course, a common idiom in many religions for close association. But there is a significant twist to the meaning of offered food in the Hindu context. Namely, the leftovers of another person, which are contaminated by his or her saliva, are generally considered to be the most polluted type of food. Therefore, accepting someone's leftovers implies maximum deference and social distance. The same pattern is observable in the common worship of feet in various Hindu contexts. Feet are also considered impure and low-status parts of the body. Still, it is very common to see imprints of feet or sandals of gurus and saints on the altar being worshipped by devotees. Even more common is the desire of devotees to touch the feet of their gurus and other holy persons. As with *prasāda*, touching the feet of another person implies a great degree of humility but such an opportunity is sought after in the case of holy persons since the touch is thought to transmit a purifying and transforming blessing on the devotee. (Ibid., 184-185.)

"Honouring *prasāda*" and *darśana* of the deities are both considered to be powerful purifying acts in ISKCON and are greatly emphasised. Similarly, as I have attempted to show, references to gurus' feet are ubiquitous in the devotional praises and hymns used in ISKCON.

To sum up, the significant dimension of the Hindu *pūjā* is the implied difference and distance in status between the devotee and the object of worship. The act of worship signifies the momentary coming together of two beings of radically unequal status, one high and pure, the other low and impure. As Fuller emphasises: "[i]n its form as an image, the deity, so to speak, has come 'down' toward the human level; through the performance of worship, the worshiper goes 'up' toward the divine level to achieve, finally, identity with the deity" (1992, 72). By achieving this close, intimate and affectionate association with the deity, the devotee is purified and transformed into a being of higher status, albeit, only temporarily.

The next question is, can we account for the way the devotees represented Prabhupāda via this kind of status process? To answer this, I will turn to a different sort of evidence, namely, the writings of Prabhupāda's first and closest disciples regarding their initial impressions of him.

## 5.6 Hindu cultural models of guruship

The ritual proceedings in ISKCON are faithful to the broader Hindu devotional tradition, and the structure of the *pūjās* and *āratis* steadfastly maintain some of the core ideas of Indian culture. Status difference, expressed through the worship of images as though they were great kings, eating the “leftovers” of God's meal and worshipping the feet of deities, give meaning and render understandable many of the ritual ideas we have been dealing with here.

Taking the Hindu caste organisation into account, it could readily be argued that status difference and the pervasive concern with ritual purity are both fundamental “cultural models” (Strauss and Quinn 1997) or “foundational schemas” (Shore 1996) in Indian culture. What is generally described as ‘culture’ by cognitive anthropologists encompasses the notion that certain ideas are relatively durable in individuals, historically long-lasting, widespread among a particular group of people, and thematic in the sense that they organise experience in widely different domains of activity. The ideas upon which the guru institution rest can be shown to be deeply embedded in Indian culture. The Hindu cultural models of status difference and purity make the institution of the guru-disciple relationship as well as the caste organisation and many other features of Indian society rather unsurprising — these are merely particular applications of a widespread and thematic cultural model. From this perspective, it is quite natural to ask whether what we describe as ‘charisma’, in connection with the guru institution, can be fully accounted for by these models.

No doubt one can go a long way in explaining the guru institution in the Indian context from this perspective. But how does one account for the situation in which the guru is operating in an alien cultural territory? How are we to understand that the people attracted to a guru are Americans and Europeans? How can a guru, especially a conservative guru like Prabhupāda, gain even a moderate following in the West? The question, for now, is whether Prabhupāda's disciples perceived and represented to themselves their relationship to Prabhupāda in terms of Indian or Western cultural models.

First of all, it can hardly be argued that Prabhupāda's first disciples were in any way culturally prepared to respond positively to (or even recognise) the notions of status hierarchy or ritual purity. Western, and especially the American, cultures have been characterised by the opposite cultural models of individualism (social atomism) and equalitarianism (Dumont 1980, 231-237). The only argument that could tenuously be advanced in this regard is the counterculture hy-



pothesis. By this argument, in the 60's a countercultural movement emerged that was characterised by values and worldviews opposed to the current Western ones. From this point of view, it could be suggested that Prabhupāda's charisma consisted of his being a figurehead of the countercultural values for the devotees. (See Judah 1974a.)

Prabhupāda's first disciples were no doubt predisposed to rebelling against the current Western or American values, ideals and ways of life, and seeking alternatives in the hippie community. Experimenting with sex, drugs and music to alter one's consciousness were very much the order of the day in the circles where Prabhupāda got his first disciples. However, Prabhupāda stood in stark opposition to the hippie values of undisciplined freedom, experimentation with drugs and free sex advocated in the counterculture milieu. Prabhupāda was not even a pacifist and he once shocked an audience of university students by telling them that they should obey their government and go to Vietnam if they happened to get drafted, and that one does not incur sin by killing if it is done under the orders of one's superiors (Hayagrīva 1985, 156-157).

In simple terms, it was immediately plain for even a casual visitor to ISKCON temples that Prabhupāda did not advocate the countercultural system of values. He stood for strict discipline, prohibited all drugs, all frivolous entertainment, and all sex not meant for procreation within marriage; he espoused an authoritarian theory of government, believed in just war and did not especially appreciate Gandhi's non-violent methods in the Indian independence struggle. He even maintained that women were naturally less intelligent than men (Hari Śauri 1994b, 222-223). He was hardly a man of the 60's American counterculture which, after all, was strongly characterised by equalitarianism, liberalism and expressive individualism (Bellah 1976). The so-called counterculture in fact shared much more features with the American values than with anything that Prabhupāda represented.

The only common denominators shared by Prabhupāda and the counterculture were protest against the mainstream American culture and fondness of musical expression. Apart from these, Prabhupāda kept the hippie community at arm's length. While he gained the first disciples from among the hippies, this does not mean that he represented their values. In fact, many report being initially shocked to hear what Prabhupāda had to say. It was not at all what they would have wanted or expected to hear. Many were, for example, predisposed to monistic and impersonalistic theology coupled with some variety of "social gospel" ideology which postulated that religion must be made "relevant" socially. Prabhupāda opposed both ideas vehemently.

Prabhupāda's charisma, then, most definitely was not based on telling the audience what they wanted to hear. He did not even fit the Americans' preconceived notions of what an Indian guru should be like — being constantly absorbed in mystical states, for instance. He was the most unlikely candidate for counterculture fame in terms of what he preached. Therefore, it can hardly be

maintained that the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement was an American (counter-culture) phenomenon of any significant measure.

### 5.6.1 STATUS DIFFERENCE

Although the counterculture did not share the notions of status hierarchy or ritual purity, it can still be argued that these notions could have been significant attractors for those few people who eventually joined. Indications of this sort are not entirely absent.

Bhūrijana dāsa describes his first days in the Second Avenue temple in New York in 1968 when he was staying there for the weekend. The devotees would engage him in various tasks and errands like going to purchase a special brand of milk for Prabhupāda. These simple services proved to be very fulfilling: “The errand to purchase milk for Swamijī especially filled me with happiness. I chanted as I walked through St. Mark’s Place and felt a deep, previously unexperienced, joy.” (1996, 4.) Bhūrijana found the concept of service, especially menial service, rendered unhesitatingly to please one’s superiors a new kind of experience, and a pleasing one at that. No doubt there are many individuals in different cultures who find the idea of status hierarchy embodied in such a notion intrinsically satisfying. The experience of hierarchical inequality may well work as a sort of revelation in the American context: one is encouraged to behave in a submissive, self-negating fashion and allowed to enjoy the experience. Hierarchical inequality also has the advantage of providing a clearly defined set of role expectations and a secure identity.

Still it may not be simply the social arrangement that is the cause of attraction here. Many devotees were capable of deriving deep religious fulfilment in such menial service. Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami describes in his book *Life with the Perfect Master* (1983a) a brief period between January and July of 1974 during which he had the opportunity to act as a personal servant and secretary to Prabhupāda. Satsvarūpa’s duties included bringing Prabhupāda his medicine and toothbrush in the morning, accompanying him on his morning walk, preparing his breakfast and lunch and providing his daily massage. In other words, the tasks were those of a menial servant, but Satsvarūpa was excited about the prospect. (1983a, 3-4.)

The first time Satsvarūpa gave Prabhupāda a massage was an intense spiritual experience for him: “Massaging Prabhupāda was like new initiation. From my side, it was completely spiritual, ecstatic exchange, the essence of the personal servant’s worship of the spiritual master.” (ibid., 5.) To understand how the service given to one’s guru can be of such value, one has to see it in the ritual context: the relationship of Prabhupāda and Satsvarūpa reiterates precisely the already familiar pattern of deity/king/honoured guest being given intimate service by menial priests/servants/hosts in the palaces/temples/homes. This time, however, it is a live person in the position of deity, giving the situation an added sig-

nificance and poignancy. Again, the theme of touching Prabhupāda's feet proved to be memorable:

That evening he called me in along with his Sanskrit editor-disciple [...] and it was then that I learned the especially sweet service of massaging Prabhupāda's legs while he lay in bed just before taking his evening's rest. [...] I felt awkward and ashamed to be allowed to come close to Kṛṣṇa's pure devotee, but I also had a blissful family sensation; I was his spiritual son, along with one of my brothers, attending to our spiritual father. (1983a, 5-6.)

The theme of status difference, enriched with the idea of intimacy, coalesce in this simple pattern of devotee massaging the spiritual master's legs and feet.

Serving food to Prabhupāda was obviously a potent field of religious cognisance also. Cooking food to Prabhupāda's taste was not an easy task since he was quite meticulous about how things should be done. Satsvarūpa describes how sometimes Prabhupāda would be easygoing and accept whatever he was offered. Sometimes he would become angry and chastise Satsvarūpa for his poor cooking. He describes the intense feelings created by these dealings as follows:

Whenever Prabhupāda ate, I would simply hang on his every word or gesture to see whether he appreciated what I had done. [...] If he said a *capātī* was not cooked, I would run back and try to make the next one come out right. I would be sometimes panting in a breathless state, sweating and nervous. Only a devotee of Prabhupāda could appreciate that all these symptoms were transcendental. It was no ordinary exchange, because Śrīla Prabhupāda was no ordinary master but a pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa. (1983, 7-8.)

This statement encapsulates very neatly the cultural models expressed in *pūjā* and innumerable other Hindu contexts. Satsvarūpa takes the posture of a menial servant with evident relish. And he is careful to point out that it is not a question of an ordinary relationship. It models exactly the relationship between God and his devotee, and thus, expresses the fundamental theological ideas of theistic Hinduism. It is also the ideal typical model of the guru-disciple relationship. The disciple should always consider him- or herself as a menial servant of the spiritual master. As Satsvarūpa states in another context:

Our relationship with Prabhupāda is always that we are his menial servants, and we should never forget that. [...] Devotional service means you serve him; and serving him means serving his mission. He is a great personality. He doesn't take service only in dressing and feeding; he takes service in executing big worldwide activities, which are his personal service to his

spiritual master and to Kṛṣṇa. So anything you can do to help in that preaching is just as direct and personal as bodily service. (Satsvarūpa 1979a, 44.)

Here the basic idiom of menial service offered to one's superiors is extended to one's relationship to the entire ISKCON. Serving ISKCON, Prabhupāda's mission is given meaning on the basis of the fundamental master-servant relationship. Serving the mission is the same as serving Prabhupāda personally. And service to Prabhupāda is as good as serving God himself. This basic idea is extended to various metaphors given to ISKCON in comparing it with Prabhupāda's body. For example, sometimes Prabhupāda spoke of his books saying that they are his heart. Money generated by distributing the books could be compared with Prabhupāda's bloodstream — with the implication that if someone mispends ISKCON's money, it is like taking Prabhupāda's blood. (Satsvarūpa 1979a, 20.)

### 5.6.2 RITUAL PURITY

The ideas of ritual purity soon took hold among Prabhupāda's followers, who were instructed to take a shower each day upon awakening, chant the *mahā-mantra* and eat *prasāda* to purify themselves. Apart from these standard requirements, numerous other Indian habits soon took root among the disciples. For example, in India, the orthodox have a habit of drinking in such a way that the lips do not touch the cup or drinking vessel. To avoid contamination, the cup is held just above the mouth and the liquid poured by tilting the head back. Having seen Prabhupāda do this, the habit was soon acquired in ISKCON. ISKCON devotees around the world can be seen to drink in this fashion.

The standard rules of conduct, the four regulative principles that every ISKCON member vows to uphold, are the backbone of ISKCON culture with regard to the ideas of ritual purity. In a letter to a devotee Prabhupāda writes:

The basic principle of our actions should be that they are all meant for pleasing Krishna. If we act always in this consciousness automatically everyone will be attracted to devotional service, and this is the secret of our preaching work. If you simply practice the regulative principles which I have introduced you will remain pure. Factually this is our only strength. Simply because we rise early, take bath, chant sixteen rounds and strive with every activity to please Krishna — this is what impresses others. (Quoted in Janānanda 1996, 6.)

The rules are: 1) no eating of meat, fish or eggs, 2) no intoxication, 3) no gambling and 4) no illicit sex.

The rule concerning food is actually extended to cover garlic, onions, factory-made bread, biscuits, and other food cooked by non-devotees. The logic be-

hind these prohibitions is that devotees eat only food that is first offered to Kṛṣṇa, and traditional rules prohibit offering many of the aforementioned food-stuffs, which are not considered ritually pure. In other words, ritual purity is behind the vegetarianism of the ISKCON life-style.

During a preaching tour in 1971 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, it was arranged that Prabhupāda stay as a guest in the house of a local supporter, who, however, was not a vegetarian. Prabhupāda refused all food cooked in that house, even that cooked by his disciples. He only accepted some milk and fruit to eat. His devotees interpreted the behaviour as the standard for all to be followed in such situations. (Janānanda 1996, 32.)

Similarly, the rule prohibiting intoxication is not based on the idea of drinking leading to immoral consequences (due to typically reduced self-control), but rather on avoiding ritually impure substances. These include not only alcohol and hard drugs but also tea, coffee, chocolate and soft drinks, all of which contain caffeine. The rule prohibiting gambling also includes activities such as watching television, going to movies, sports and listening to mundane music. In other words, it is not the possible unethical consequences of drinking and gambling that are the prime concern but participation in low-status activities and company that may ritually pollute one.

The rule prohibiting illicit sex prohibits all sexual activities that do not aim at conceiving children within marriage. Bhakti Vikaśa Swami writes that “[m]asturbation is also considered illicit sex because it uselessly wastes vital fluid and it *contaminates our consciousness*” (1994, 36, my emphasis). According to traditional Indian cultural ideas, the sex act is polluting. Therefore, numerous rules exist concerning the time and place of suitable intercourse. Entering the temple after sex is considered an offence. One should also take a bath after having sex. (Prema Rāsa and Sāndīpani Muni 1997, 84.)

In light of the strictness of these rules, it is noteworthy that Prabhupāda maintained that he never once in his life transgressed these rules. In a letter to Tamal Krishna Goswami, Prabhupāda writes that “[a]lthough I had immense opportunities to indulge in the four pillars of sinful life because I was connected to with a very aristocratic family, Kṛṣṇa always saved me, and throughout my whole life I do not know what is illicit sex, intoxication, meat-eating or gambling” (quoted in Tamal 1984, 355).

Certainly his devotees saw this as a nearly superhuman feat. Very early on, many people perceived Prabhupāda in terms of purity — a notion which characteristically comprises physical appearance, state of mind and moral rectitude. Notions of purity abound in ISKCON talk. One devotee describes Prabhupāda sitting on his *vyāsāsana*: “I don’t remember what Śrīla Prabhupāda said there, but I just remember sitting there trying to listen. How completely calm His Divine Grace was, always spotlessly clean, garlanded with fragrant flowers and emanating the sweet aroma of sandalwood paste which he often had on his forehead.” (Quoted in Janānanda 1996, 32.) Satsvarūpa has written about his feelings in

front of Prabhupāda's picture, which was hung on the kitchen wall: "I remember feeling so impure that I did not even want to look at that picture. I used to think Prabhupāda was looking directly at me from that picture, and I felt impure." (1991, 159.) One of the most common attributes used to characterise Prabhupāda is "pure devotee".

Secondly, if the rules are mainly prohibitions to avoid impure actions, substances and places, the flip side of the coin is that devotees should seek and relish the opportunity to "associate" with ritually pure persons, visit sacred places and consume purifying substances. Association with the spiritual master is especially valued among the ISKCON devotees. The chance to meet a pure devotee like Prabhupāda is considered very rare and thus extremely fortunate. The emphasis placed on *prasāda*, ritually offered food, in ISKCON is world famous. Naturally, when both these ways of purifying oneself coalesced in an opportunity to eat something that Prabhupāda had personally cooked, the event would be especially memorable. As Tamal Krishna comments: "The taste of the preparations he cooked was like pure nectar. Personally, I never tasted *prasādam* as when Prabhupāda cooked it himself. It was completely different, totally on the transcendental platform." (1984, 72.)

### 5.6.3 PURITY AND HIERARCHY COMBINED

Into these four simple rules prohibiting the eating of meat, intoxicants, gambling and illicit sex, Prabhupāda managed to condense an entire Indian cultural heritage of notions of ritual purity and status hierarchy, which in turn eventually fed back into how he was perceived by his devotees. Prabhupāda's behaviour seems by all available accounts to have been spotless in this regard. The inevitable consequence is spelled out by Janānanda: "We all have faults in this world. The only remedy to rectify our condition is to associate with true *mahātmās*." (1996, 82.) That is to say, not many persons who met Prabhupāda in the West would have regarded themselves very highly if they judged themselves by the standards of the four rules. Adopted as ideals to be upheld, whether successfully or unsuccessfully, and combined with the perception that for Prabhupāda these were no problem at all, resulted in a sort of leverage that inevitably raised Prabhupāda's status. Purity and status difference therefore combined, with each being seen as an essential part of a single process.

Satsvarūpa also manages to put these two cultural models together in a simple formula: "Everyone should desire intimate association with a pure devotee. [...] And that intimate association means that you are serving and he is pleased by your service." (1979a, 16-17.) This confirms the idea that Prabhupāda's devotees represented him in terms of the Indian cultural models of purity and status difference, expressed in the desirability of intimate association with a pure devotee through serving him. It seems, therefore, that through the four regulative principles and the ritual activities of deity worship and *kīrtana*, Prabhupāda managed to instil age-old Indian cultural idioms into his disciples, who in turn repre-

sented him in terms of these idioms. Whatever the initial attraction of Prabhupāda for his disciples, it seems that they picked up Indian ways of thinking remarkably quickly.

## 5.7 Conclusion

The description and analysis of the ISKCON morning programme reveals that the rituals and their effects show marked features of the doctrinal mode of religiosity. The highly routinised rituals do not seem capable of producing special and memorable religious experiences that could be encoded in episodic memory. Rather, as we have seen, the rituals aim at producing a special “taste”, or a background feeling, that the devotees relish. This taste is envisaged as a necessary but secondary part of spiritual life to be able to maintain the arduous missionary and preaching work expected of fully committed devotees. The associations provided by ritual symbolism are also standard ones of hierarchy and ritual purity and are rarely reflected upon.

It has also been demonstrated that Prabhupāda’s disciples consistently represented him with the ubiquitous cultural models of status hierarchy and purity. The notion of menial service voluntarily rendered to a ritually pure high-status being is a model according to which widely differing activities and relationships are understood in ISKCON. The guru-disciple relationship thus reiterates the relationship established in deity worship between the priest and the deity. The crucial question is, of course, whether this is all there is to it. In the next section, we will examine whether there are other ways of representing the guru-disciple relationship; ways which are not easily reduced to these kinds of cultural models but for which other kinds of explanations must be sought.

## SECTION SIX

# Origins of Prabhupāda's charisma

In the previous section the ritual life of ISKCON was explored. The daily cycle of rituals is an important medium for transmission of religious conceptions in the movement. It is also the primary medium for interaction with the guru. Not only do most of the disciples encounter the guru in the settings provided by the rituals, the ritual language also provides the disciples with various models and idioms for thinking about the guru.

In this section I shall present a number of cases of Prabhupāda's interactions with his disciples and prospective disciples in a variety of settings. The incidents described provide a useful foundation for analysing the ways in which Prabhupāda was perceived by his disciples. There are two questions to which this material provides answers. First is the issue of what Prabhupāda actually did in the situations in which he attracted his first disciples? For this question, I shall first give as broad a spectrum of incidents as possible to provide a comprehensive picture of Prabhupāda's behaviour and its contexts.

Second, I shall take up the tricky issue of the origins of Prabhupāda's charisma. I shall present the interactive situations in such a way that we also gain insight into the devotees' ways of seeing them. What is it that made these incidents memorable in the first place? What is it that struck people about these situations that made them approach Prabhupāda in religious terms? More specifically, I shall examine the issue of whether the Hindu cultural models can account for the ways in which the disciples saw Prabhupāda. In other words, we shall use the knowledge gained in the previous section about the Hindu cultural models to test the hypothesis that it is precisely these models that can account for Prabhupāda's charisma. I intend to show that this hypothesis is false and that there are other processes at work — processes that require a completely different approach.



## 6.1 Prabhupāda through the eyes of his first disciples

In the spring of 1966, Prabhupāda lived in lower Manhattan's Bowery, which was at that time a rather low-status district. Bowery was famous for its degradation since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and it was still known as skid row in the 60's. The place was notorious for its ubiquitous loiterers and homeless alcoholics. They slept in lodging houses that had to be vacated during the day, which meant that they spent most of their time on the streets. But the City had also given permission for artists to live in buildings in Bowery that had originally been constructed as factories in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. So the community of young artists and musicians was slowly giving the area a new kind of atmosphere. The abandoned factories had been fitted with heating systems, shower rooms, etc., to facilitate living, otherwise they provided large open spaces for artists to work in. One of Prabhupāda's early acquaintances lived in one of these A.I.R. (artists-in-residence) buildings. When the artist decided to leave for California in April 1966, he offered his studio to Prabhupāda and another friend. Prabhupāda was still a lone figure in the neighbourhood. While there was no one yet who could be called a disciple, word was soon passed around in the local macrobiotic restaurant that an Indian swami had moved there and led chanting in the evenings. (Satsvarūpa 1993b, 67-72.)

The loft was on the top floor of a four-storey building. It was a large space of almost thirty metres in length and seven and a half metres in width. At one end of the long room was a room divider, which hid Prabhupāda's personal living quarters and in front of this was a small (3 x 1.5 m) dais on which he was seated when leading *kīrtanas* or lecturing. The dais faced the entrance of the room at the opposite end. (Ibid., 71.) Here Prabhupāda held his meetings to which everyone was invited. Every morning Prabhupāda held a class on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* to an audience of two or three people. The evening meetings were held on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, beginning at eight o'clock, during which he would lead a half hour *kīrtana*, a forty-five minute lecture on *Bhagavad-gītā*, answer some questions and finally lead another half an hour *kīrtana* (ibid., 81).

Most of Prabhupāda's Bowery acquaintances were musicians or friends of musicians. These hip young people, experimenting with music, drugs, spiritual meditation and everything avant-garde, were immediately drawn to the singing. The main instruments were the harmonium, hand-drums and cymbals, but Prabhupāda also allowed visitors to play their own instruments. (ibid., 78.) These *kīrtanas* would attract numerous people, but the talks were less popular. As Satsvarūpa writes "it was not uncommon for half the audience to leave before the talk began, and sometimes people would leave in the middle of the lecture" (ibid., 238).

During evening meetings the room would be dimly lit and the air heavy with incense. Before Prabhupāda would start his prayers, everyone would be quiet or talking in hushed tones. Prabhupāda would also sit quietly on the dais, in meditation. On the floor would be lots of pillows and mats for people to sit on but very

little furniture. No pictures or statues were present at that time, except for a few paintings that Prabhupāda's artist roommate had done. (Ibid., 77.)

Mukunda dāsa met Prabhupāda in the summer of 1966 during one of the evening meetings (Mukunda 1977). He was invited by a friend to hear a lecture by “an old Indian swami” in the Bowery. Being curious about the odd combination of an Indian swami lecturing on skid row, he went there one evening. He describes how the rhythmic sounds of bells got louder as he climbed the dark staircase. Upon entering the room, he saw Prabhupāda sitting on his dais. His description of the situation is worth quoting in full:

About fifty feet away from where I stood, at the other end of a long dark room, he sat on a small dais, his face and saffron robes radiant under a small light. He was elderly, [...] and he sat cross leggedly in an erect, stately posture. His head was shaven, and his powerful face and reddish horn-rimmed glasses gave him a look of a monk who had spent most of his life absorbed in study. His eyes were closed, and he softly chanted simple Sanskrit prayer while playing a hand drum. The small audience joined him at intervals, in call-and-response fashion. A few played hand cymbals, which accounted for the bell-like sounds I'd heard.

After a few moments the swami began lecturing in English, apparently from a huge Sanskrit volume that lay open before him. Occasionally he would quote from the book, but more often from memory. The sound of the language was beautiful, and he followed each passage with meticulously detailed explanations.

He sounded like a scholar, his vocabulary intricately laced with philosophical terms and phrases. Elegant hand gestures and animated facial expressions added considerable impact to his delivery. The subject matter was the most weighty I had ever encountered: “I am not this body. I am not Indian. ... You are not Americans. ... We are all spirit souls ...” (Mukunda 1977, ix.)

Having seen Prabhupāda, Mukunda became even more curious about this strange guru in New York. Several days later he visited the swami in the afternoon to talk with him. To his surprise, the swami was not busy at all and seemed in fact prepared to talk with him all day about his background in India and especially philosophical topics. Mukunda comments: “In philosophical debate and logic Prabhupāda was undefeatable and indefatigable. He would interrupt translating work for discussions that would last up to eight hours.” (Ibid., xi.) He also saw how austere Prabhupāda's life-style was. Prabhupāda slept on a small mattress, washed his own clothes, and cooked for himself with a curious Indian utensil. In addition, there was an ancient typewriter and endless stacks of manuscripts. (Ibid., x-xi.)

Hayagrīva dāsa met Prabhupāda first in June of 1966 on the street in Bowery passing through the traffic and stumbling derelicts. The sight of an Indian swami on the streets of New York left a permanent impression on him: “He strolls almost jauntily down the sidewalk. He is an old man whom age has never touched. Aloof from the people and bustle about him, he walks proudly, independently, his hand in a cloth beadbag. He wears the saffron robes of a sannyasi, and on his feet are quaint, pointed white shoes.” (Hayagrīva 1985, 1.) Upon seeing Prabhupāda, Hayagrīva immediately goes to talk to him. After a brief exchange, Prabhupāda invites him to go and see the new place he has acquired. In the summer of 1966 Prabhupāda had obtained a new place to live and hold classes. It is a small storefront on Second Avenue on the Lower East Side. The place had formerly been a nostalgic gift shop; there was still a big sign on top of the window: “Matchless Gifts”. Finally, Prabhupāda invites him to come and listen to his lectures held 7-9 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. (Ibid., 1-2.)

On the next Monday evening, Hayagrīva comes with a couple of his friends to listen to the swami lecture in the small seven and a half by twelve-meter unfurnished storefront. There are only straw mats on the floor for sitting, and a bare lightbulb hangs in the middle of the room. Prabhupāda enters the room from the back and sits on the floor on one of the mats facing the visitors. As Hayagrīva describes:

His attire is humble, ascetic: a saffron dhoti worn in the style of a sannyasi monk, and a saffron *chadar* over his shoulders. As he sits erect and cross-legged, his body seems to dwindle. His magnetism and personality are concentrated in his face, large and noble like a Buddha’s. It is a serene, meditative, grave face, a tranquil face, encompassing joy, compassion, sorrow, and much, much more. It is a face unlike I have ever seen. (Ibid., 7.)

Hayagrīva is one of the few people who became more seriously interested in Prabhupāda’s message and started visiting the storefront regularly, also attending the early morning classes held in Prabhupāda’s apartment on the second floor, behind the storefront. At these early morning meetings, eight or ten young men in their twenties are now present. All cross-legged on the floor in front of Prabhupāda, who sits behind a tin footlocker and looks fresh from being awake for hours (ibid., 17). Prabhupāda chants his Sanskrit prayers, which no one in the audience knows — so they just listen. As Hayagrīva describes: “Entranced, we listen to Swamijī chant. His presence dominates the small room, Absorbed in chanting, he closes his eyes. His head is golden, shiny, radiant. As he chants, he looks like a happy child calling to his maker.” (Ibid., 18.)

Tamal Krishna Goswami first met Prabhupāda in San Francisco in 1967. He was invited by a friend to take part in the Sunday feast held at the storefront temple in the Haight-Ashbury district. Entering the temple was like “stepping

into another world.” The room was filled with incense and was brightly lit. The exotic deities of Jagannātha, Balarāma and Subhadrā stood on the altar at the back of the room. The young hippies were already filling the place and Prabhupāda sat on a raised dais facing the visitors chanting the prayers to his spiritual masters. Tamal Krishna describes the proceedings:

As the prayers came to an end, Śrīla Prabhupāda began to chant the Pañca-tattva *mantra*, and one by one the *mṛdanga*, *tambura*, and harmonium began to sound, along with *karatālas*. Then finally came the *mahā-mantra* [...] The opening prayers had created a meditative mood, but now the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra*, chanted by everyone, filled the temple room and took command. As the volume and tempo increased, the devotees stood up and began to dance backward and forward. I also stood up, eager to take part. The whole room became a sea of swaying bodies, like so many waves moving back and forth to the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Prabhupāda led the *kīrtana*, striking his *karatālas* strongly, increasing the beat, while surveying the enthusiastic congregation with a knowing satisfaction. I was enjoying the *kīrtana*, feeling exhilarated by the dancing and chanting. My heart felt light, my mind freed from any worries. The chanting continued for more than half an hour, and then, when it seemed to have reached a great crescendo, Prabhupāda struck his *karatālas* in a final note, and gradually the instruments faded, one by one, like an ebbing tide. As he pronounced the *prema-dhvani* prayers, his congregation settled, lulled by the waves of ecstatic *kīrtana*. Now it was time for the lecture. (Tamal 1984, 9-10.)

## 6.2 The role of devotional ecstasies

From these descriptions, it seems evident that much attention was focused on both Prabhupāda’s personality and the moods and emotions created in the audience by the congregational singing. So it seems natural to question as to how Prabhupāda exhibited himself and his moods and ecstasies, and how much importance was placed on religious experiences created by the rituals.

Prabhupāda’s dress and his facial expressions certainly attracted attention apart from the singing and lectures. In this respect, Hayagrīva’s description of a particularly memorable *Bhāgavatam* lecture is instructive. Prabhupāda had been discussing Caitanya’s disciples living in Vṛndāvana, crying ecstatically after Kṛṣṇa, when he suddenly pauses.

After this, Swamiji says no more but sits cross-legged on the dais, hands folded, eyes closed in sudden, unexpected, rapt meditation. It’s as though he’s been struck by a bolt from the blue. As we sit watching him, we all suddenly feel an electric, vibrant stillness settling over the temple. This is some-

thing unusual, we all sense, yet dare not speak, dare not look at one another, dare not take our eyes from him. Perceivable spiritual phenomenon! We can actually see him withdraw deep within himself and leave the body, the temple, the city, the world far behind, so deep is his communion. We bathe in this intense silence for only three or four minutes, but, as in earthquakes, those minutes seem eternal for us all. But unlike earthquakes, there is no tumult. Just an awesome stillness prolonging those minutes more than tumult ever could.

We see his consciousness return to his body. He clears his throat, slowly opens his eyes, and reaches for the cymbals beside him. (Hayagrīva 1985, 181.)

From this description, it is obvious that Prabhupāda sometimes did evidence signs of ecstasy during his public performances. More important, however, is Hayagrīva describing the event as very unusual. This sort of thing was not a regular occurrence, but a very special event that devotees gossiped and speculated about for days (ibid., 182). Stories about events like this soon spread around the movement. Bhūrijana dāsa (1996) recounts an event that stretched credibility so much that he had to confirm it from Prabhupāda himself. He had heard a number of times that when a certain devotee had asked Prabhupāda about his *rasa* (special intimate relationship with Kṛṣṇa), Prabhupāda had suddenly started to glow brighter and brighter so that the devotee had finally crawled out of the room. Bhūrijana asked Prabhupāda directly whether this had happened. He describes that as a response to the question, “Prabhupāda smiled, leaned back, and expanded his smile even further. ‘Just see,’ he said while shaking his head.” Bhūrijana comments further that “Prabhupāda’s ‘just see’ and his expression told it all. The remainder of the sentence — ‘the nonsense that people are speaking’ — was clearly understood.” (1996, 252.)

As a matter of fact, Prabhupāda did not make a big deal out of devotional ecstasies and clearly put them in a secondary position to acceptance, understanding, preaching the doctrine of Kṛṣṇa conscious philosophy and obeying the orders of the guru. Tamal Krishna Goswami (1984) describes a telling incident that took place in march 1969 in the Los Angeles temple. There was an Indian lady visiting Prabhupāda at the temple, giving him a present of few grains of dust from Vṛndāvana. Prabhupāda seemed to appreciate the devotional attitude expressed by the lady and encouraged his disciples to treat her respectfully. But then one day, when she was leading *kīrtana* in the temple, “she suddenly fell backwards and began to roll around on the floor, crying out in ecstasy” (ibid., 93). No one had ever seen Prabhupāda do such a thing, so the devotees were perplexed as to how deal with the situation. Eventually they wrote a letter to Prabhupāda asking about it. In his reply, Prabhupāda warned his disciples not to make such a show of ecstasy. Tamal Krishna concludes that “[a] genuine devotee’s advancement is proven not by such cheap displays but by how much he is eager to perform ser-

vice to Kṛṣṇa in any of the nine legitimate methods” (ibid., 94). Thus, clear limits were imposed on the spontaneous expression of emotion during *kīrtana*.

Ecstasy certainly was not the most important value to Prabhupāda. Tireless preaching and dutiful following of orders given by one’s guru were far more highly appreciated signs of devotion. A common slogan that captured Prabhupāda’s attitude was, “work now, *samādhi* later” (ibid., 397). Accordingly, Prabhupāda himself was careful not to make extensive displays of uncontrolled ecstasy as a marker that separated him from ordinary people.

### 6.3 Prabhupāda’s childlikeness

Some of the previous quotations already give indications that something besides mere notions of purity and hierarchy may be found at the basis of Prabhupāda’s charismatic appeal. The image of Prabhupāda as a child illustrates well the difficulties of trying to appeal to cultural models alone as an explanation.

Hayagrīva was quoted as comparing Prabhupāda to “a happy child calling to his maker.” Comparing Prabhupāda to a child, or commenting on his “boyish” qualities, is one of the most striking ways he was perceived by some of his disciples. This perception of youthfulness or childlikeness in Prabhupāda is a good example of an image which is easily explained by the Hindu tradition but which lands us into problems if we try to explain it similarly within the Western setting. Guru’s childlikeness is a rather complex and many-sided image, capable of being interpreted from widely differing angles.

First, Kṛṣṇa of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is depicted as a cowherd boy. The *Bhāgavatam* describes the playful pranks of the child Kṛṣṇa with vivid and memorable details. Thus, comparing Prabhupāda to an innocent boy in fact tacitly establishes his close kinship to the child Kṛṣṇa. Although this is rarely explained theologically, the parallel is too obvious to ignore.

Second, the cultural models of ritual purity can come superimposed on the image of the child. Satsvarūpa describes Prabhupāda by contrasting him to a “heavy sense-indulger”, a person who has dedicated life to hedonism. While persons of this kind often exhibit a kind of weariness and a jaded outlook, Prabhupāda never expressed such attitudes. He invariably seemed fresh, light, optimistic and energetic: “His outlook was like a spring day” (Satsvarūpa 1996, 179) — an outlook and attitude that easily evokes images of childlike purity and optimism.

So one might attempt to explain the image of childlikeness in terms of Vaiṣṇava theological models embedded in Purāṇic literature. However, a closer look at the representations reveals other possible avenues to analyse.

One of the things that certainly contributed to the perception of childlikeness in Prabhupāda was Prabhupāda’s energetic demeanour. Despite Prabhupāda being 70 years old by the time he started to get followers, according to all reports,

he seemed exceptionally youthful and vigorous in appearance. Prabhupāda habitually slept less than five hours a day (see above) and only about three hours of this during the night. To the young hippies, this must have seemed almost super-human for a man of his age.

Secondly, there is a theme of a certain kind of innocence in these perceptions. As Satsvarūpa comments, “anyone who was with Prabhupāda felt the possibilities of being free from sexual implications” (ibid., 179). Prabhupāda often referred to his disciples as “innocent boys and girls,” which shows that this idea of returning to a pre-puberty outlook as a route to holiness was not entirely tacit in the movement.

Prabhupāda also acted like an innocent child in another way; namely, in his outspokenness and openness. Prabhupāda did not attempt to hide his incompetence in worldly knowledge from anyone. He once told his disciples that when he first saw snow in New York he thought first that the city had been whitewashed (ibid., 179). Numerous other details of cultural incompetency were revealed during his stay in the West, but this only contributed to his being seen as utterly non-deceptive. For the disciples, there simply seemed to be no facade that Prabhupāda was upholding.

The important question here is to determine the origin of these perceptions. That Prabhupāda is seen as ritually pure and boyish like Kṛṣṇa may seem unsurprising in the context of a Hindu movement. It could possibly be argued that these depictions of Prabhupāda can be accounted for by the cultural upbringing of the disciples. In other words, these perceptions may have become salient for the disciples *after* they had been socialised into the movement’s cultural models, values and modes of life. This would mean that people would first have to learn these ideas in order to appreciate these qualities and find them attractive in Prabhupāda. But then the question arises, how did the Americans and Europeans learn these cultural models? In most cases the answer is: they learned it from Prabhupāda. Which means that they would have to have been attracted to Prabhupāda *before* learning these ideas. Again one is faced with the question: why then did they become attracted to him if not for these kinds of reasons?

I think it is fairly evident that the American youth did not initially find Prabhupāda attractive because he reminded them of Kṛṣṇa or because he so meticulously maintained the rules of ritual purity. Generally, people knew nothing about either cultural item before coming into contact with Prabhupāda. For them, it was sufficient that somehow Prabhupāda acted *differently* from anyone they knew before. In many instances, Prabhupāda’s disciples found it difficult to pin down what exactly was so special about him, but they were certain that he was different and special in a very beneficial way.

It is much more economical to explain the situation from the opposite angle: Prabhupāda’s life-style and allusions to an unknown Hindu God were just two more ways in which he differed from anyone the prospective disciples knew and which made him appear special in their eyes. It is unlikely that the hippies would

have appreciated such things as consciously held ideological notions. Thus, this was not a case of recognition of something previously known and valued, but a kinship to something completely unfamiliar that was the cause of the initial attraction.

Pursuing this line of thought, we can now look at the situation more fully. There are in fact numerous recurring themes that give support to the notion that the key to understanding the way Prabhupāda was seen by the devotees is what Goffman terms ‘frame violations’. In other words, Prabhupāda was, for whatever reason, singularly capable of behaving in a way that tacitly violated his audiences’ frameworks of understanding social behaviour. In what follows, I will analyse different facets of this phenomenon.

## 6.4 Frame violations

Vedavyāsa dāsa describes in his book (1996) how the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement started spreading in Europe in the late 60’s and early 70’s. The movement expanded in Europe mainly because of the diligent work of Prabhupāda’s disciples. From late 1968 onwards, Kṛṣṇa consciousness was introduced to Europeans by travelling preachers who tried to establish centres and attract new people wherever they went. Vedavyāsa’s book contains lengthy quotations from interviews of these European devotees concerning their first impressions of Prabhupāda. These quotations provide a useful indication of the range of different perceptions and reactions people had when they initially met Prabhupāda.

One of the first disciples to go to Europe was Śivānanda dāsa, who was initiated by Prabhupāda in July 1967. After meeting Prabhupāda in the summer of 1968, Śivānanda learned that Prabhupāda wanted someone to go to London to open a temple. Śivānanda was very excited about the prospect of going to Europe to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness and he got Prabhupāda’s permission to go. However, when he arrived at the London airport in full Vaiṣṇava dress with a shaved head, *śikha*, *dhoti* and *tilaka*, the customs officials refused him entry to the country. Śivānanda therefore decided to go to Amsterdam instead. After a brief stay, he moved on to West Berlin and eventually settled in Hamburg in early 1969. In the meanwhile, Prabhupāda had managed to find two other disciples to assist Śivānanda. By spring these three young men had managed to find a suitable storefront for a temple. By the beginning of June their first local devotee was living in the temple and by the end of the month they had printed their first German issue of *Back to Godhead* magazine. In August, another boy moved into the temple.

### 6.4.1 PRABHUPĀDA’S SPECIALNESS

On August 25, 1969 Prabhupāda arrived at Hamburg airport, where all the disciples and prospective disciples had gathered to receive him. One of the European



devotees had only seen a picture of Prabhupāda which failed to inspire much devotion: “there he looked so thin and sick that I had difficulty appreciating his transcendental qualities” (quoted in Vedavyāsa 1996, 38). But his first encounter with Prabhupāda changed his perception entirely:

As soon as he came through customs, everything seemed to become illuminated by the golden hue of his shining face and by his saffron colored robes. As Prabhupāda approached us, he didn’t seem to walk but almost dance, giving the impression that he was floating on the ground. (Ibid.)

Here Prabhupāda is represented as a shining, almost weightless being who stands out from the crowd. Not only did Prabhupāda stand out from the rest of humanity, he also seemed to extend his atmosphere and influence on people around him. The devotees had rented a flat near the temple for Prabhupāda to live in during his stay in Hamburg. They all gathered in Prabhupāda’s small room on the evening of his arrival. They sang *kīrtana* and offered *ārati* to the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa deities Prabhupāda had brought. A devotee remembers sitting right in front of Prabhupāda and observing his fingers while he was playing a harmonium: “In such a unique and intimate situation I felt completely in another world.” (Ibid., 40.) These two themes of difference and influence recur in most depictions of first encounters with Prabhupāda and his disciples.

When Prabhupāda came to visit Paris in July 1972, most of the new German devotees went there to meet him in person. By that time temples had been opened in Heidelberg, Stuttgart, Frankfurt and Dusseldorf, and so there were many new people eager to meet him. Fifty to seventy devotees went to the Orly airport to receive him. Devotees invariably report seeing Prabhupāda as mysteriously “different”. Many devotees describe in vivid terms how Prabhupāda somehow stood out from the other passengers at the airport:

To me those people appeared like a grey mass, but Prabhupāda stood out like luminous personality. [...] In contrast to the other passengers, who appeared to me like shadows, Prabhupāda seemed to be the only real person. (Ibid., 177)

His spirituality was palpable, and distinguished him from everyone else around him. Śrīla Prabhupāda’s bright eyes were glancing mercifully over the assembled devotees, and at the same time he emanated deep humility. (Ibid., 177)

Especially his hands caught my attention; they were fine and aristocratic. [...] he was someone completely different from any other person I had ever seen. (Ibid., 180)

#### 6.4.2 EMOTIONAL IMPACT

As soon as Prabhupāda appeared the atmosphere became charged with emotion. The mass of devotees sung *kīrtana* at the arrival hall. Many devotees describe the situation as emotionally overwhelming. When Prabhupāda saw the disciples he smiled and waved. Upon seeing him, all the devotees threw themselves flat on the floor in two lines to offer obeisances. One devotee recalls the experience:

I was so overwhelmed seeing Prabhupāda in person for the first time that I immediately fell to the ground and offered obeisances. I laughed and cried simultaneously. My body trembled, and within a few seconds I experienced all kinds of contradictory emotions. (Quoted in Vedavyāsa 1996, 176.)

The emotional impact Prabhupāda had on the devotees gathered around him is striking. Smallest details of Prabhupāda's appearance were noticed and had an immediate effect:

When I saw Śrīla Prabhupāda for the first time at the Paris airport I didn't see anything special right away, but as he approached, I noticed tears in his eyes. And when I bowed down to offer obeisances, tears also welled up in my eyes. (Ibid., 175.)

Later on, during a *kīrtana* at the temple, one devotee observed how Prabhupāda's gestures affected the disciples. Singing and playing the hand cymbals with his eyes closed, Prabhupāda's demeanor at first was grave. However, a small five-year-old girl happened to be dancing in front of Prabhupāda, and when he suddenly saw her, his face lit into a wide smile. When the devotees in turn saw the smile, "it was as if the smile infused everyone with renewed energy", and the intensity and ecstasy of the *kīrtana* "increased tenfold" (ibid.).

These initial encounters were certainly exceptional situations. For those who later became Prabhupāda's devotees, it was a culmination point of possibly years of spiritual search and inquiry. The meeting was prepared for and anticipated weeks or months in advance. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that people would react with exceptional intensity.

#### 6.4.3 EXTRAORDINARY ORDINARINESS

It is noteworthy that Prabhupāda's charisma was not dependent on any specific setting or circumstances. Prabhupāda was not extraordinarily inaccessible, only appearing at carefully orchestrated mass events. To be sure, he visited specific temples only rarely because he was constantly travelling from one to another due to the rapidly expanding movement. But wherever he went, the disciples were always around him. They received him in the airports, taking him to the temple or to his living quarters. They participated in temple worship and listened his lec-

tures. They accompanied him on his regular morning walks and conversed with him during the evening meetings. They also had ample opportunity for private meetings with him. The only time Prabhupāda had privacy was in the early morning hours, when he was working on his translations and commentaries. Thus, the charisma was not very extensively “stage managed”. In fact, the opposite appears to be the case. It is precisely when Prabhupāda was glimpsed during his intimate dealings in different situations and with different devotees that most frequently occasioned perceptions which made Prabhupāda seem special in devotees’ eyes.

One such incident took place in the Bangkok airport, where Prabhupāda was waiting for a flight connection after several hours of flying. He was in the company of his assistant and suddenly decided to have a bath. The airport did not have any shower facilities, only a men’s room with a small sink. Despite this, Prabhupāda proceeded to wash himself in the men’s room as if it was the most natural thing in the world. He removed his clothes and covered the lower portion of the body with a cloth and started to wash himself with soap and water obtained from the faucet. By using a small cup he rinsed himself, thus spilling water all over the floor. The assistant then gave him a towel and fresh clothes. The local attendant saw what they were doing and became upset, speaking to Prabhupāda and the assistant animatedly. Prabhupāda just laughed good-humouredly and said “I had to bathe, I was feeling very tired”. The assistant comments upon the story: “Śrīla Prabhupāda could do something very unusual, yet he would do it as if it were perfectly normal” (quoted in Satsvarūpa 1996, 310-311).

On the other hand, Prabhupāda also could do something very normal and ordinary, and yet do it in a way that seemed unusual, thus captivating people’s attention. One devotee recalls observing Prabhupāda drinking some water from a cup:

It was amazing because I had never seen anything done with such precision. It was a small thing, a tiny gesture, but there was something unique about it. I realized that anyone who could drink a glass of water like that was not an ordinary person. [...] Most people do ordinary things carelessly without thinking about them, yet somehow or other he always acted with full deliberation. It was, I guess, just a side effect of being Kṛṣṇa conscious. (Ibid., 271.)

#### 6.4.4 SELF-CONTROL

One of the recurring themes in observations of Prabhupāda is his amazing self-control. Another thing, in seeming contradiction, is Prabhupāda’s bursts of anger. One such incident took place when a boy who was assigned to guard Prabhupāda’s door had wandered off. Prabhupāda rung his bell repeatedly and yet the boy did not show up. There was another disciple present during the incident and he saw how Prabhupāda later reprimanded the boy severely for several minutes. Prabhupāda seemed very angry and chastised the boy until the youth

started shaking. However, as soon as the chastised boy had left the room, Prabhupāda resumed his conversation with the other devotee in a completely normal mood. The anger had vanished immediately upon the boy disappearing from sight. Prabhupāda gave an impression of being in complete control of his emotions, the anger simply seemed to be a play-act for the rectification of the disobedient disciple. (Ibid., 212.)

#### 6.4.5 INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Not only was Prabhupāda uncannily deliberate and always with the air of being in control of himself, he also seemed extraordinarily perceptive and skilful with regard to other people. One disciple, who accompanied Prabhupāda to various places in Europe under different circumstances, comments on his surprising ability to adapt himself to a particular kind of person or audience:

To me it seemed mystical how he knew immediately where a person was at. On several occasions he sensed right from the beginning where a conversation was leading and would answer questions even before they had been asked. Thus it happened that some of his guests would naturally stop questioning after a while and just listen, because they could see that Prabhupāda was on their wavelength, addressing exactly the problems on their minds. (Quoted in Vedavyāsa 1996, 231.)

Prabhupāda also appeared very skilful in dealing with his audiences. After lectures, he regularly gave the audience an opportunity to ask questions. As one might guess, the response was not always entirely favourable. After one lecture in London, one man in the audience challenged the idea of transmigration of souls by shouting out defiantly “Hey, Swamiji! You said if we’re not careful, in the next life we’ll become a dog. But I want to tell you that I don’t mind if I become a dog in my next life.” To this outburst, Prabhupāda simply said “You have my blessings” and the man immediately sat down. (Satsvarūpa 1993d, 52.)

Prabhupāda took part in every opportunity to publicise his cause, and therefore, he sometimes appeared in somewhat uncharacteristic situations such as TV talk shows. Talk shows are typically meant for light entertainment and are characteristic of a sort of snappy rhetoric — both quite unlike Prabhupāda, who was fond of expressing himself in the form of long lectures on “deep” philosophical issues. However, when Prabhupāda appeared in fall 1969 on Britain’s then most popular TV talk show called “Late Night Line-Up”, he somehow seemed able to adapt to the mood of the show and use it to his advantage. When the interviewer asked Prabhupāda whether he had a concept of hell in his religion, Prabhupāda retorted “Yes, London is hell.” Talk show hosts are accustomed to snappy one-liners, but this time he appeared stunned at the reply. To ameliorate the host’s embarrassment, Prabhupāda continued by indicating that he meant primarily the damp weather: “Of course, it is a very great credit to the English people to have

established such a great civilization in such a climate.” As Satsvarūpa, who recorded this incident perceived it, the host was “beaten at his own game from the start.” (Ibid., 54-55.)

Prabhupāda was also often seen as being adept at dealing with potential troublemakers. Because he was always strict with the fourth rule prohibiting illicit sex, it usually meant that he had to marry the disciples who were couples. When young people joined the movement and immediately got married in alien Hindu ceremonies, some parents got upset. One American couple who were initiated just two weeks after they met Prabhupāda got married two weeks later. The girl’s father from Texas came to the temple on the evening of the wedding and protested to Prabhupāda about the radically un-American nature of the movement. He especially disliked the idea that his daughter had an Indian name and confronted Prabhupāda about the issue. An Indian guest happened to be at the temple and Prabhupāda looked at the father and the guest and asked, with a grin on his face, “You don’t like Indians?” Everyone present found the situation humorous and laughed. Apparently, the tension in the situation was then released because the father soon changed his attitude. On a more serious note, Prabhupāda then explained that “If you love her, you will like what she likes. Your daughter is happy, why do you object?” The father ended up staying in the temple and eating *prasāda* with his new son-in-law. (Satsvarūpa 1993c, 27.)

As these examples show, Prabhupāda was often represented as being capable of resolving conflicts to everyone’s satisfaction. In the disciples’ view, he was able to maintain an uncanny control in interpersonal situations. No one was able to catch him off guard. In other words, Prabhupāda was seen as performing what in Goffmanian terms would be termed ‘stunts’; that is to say, he seemed to have an uncanny ability to maintain control in situations where failures and slips were intuitively expected.

## 6.5 Conclusion

What I have been trying to argue here is that the key to analysing Prabhupāda’s charisma lies not in the fact that he happened to exemplify his audience’s preconceived ideals and values. It is more likely that his charisma was initially based on his being able to behave in a way that defied his audience’s deeply-rooted expectations. He was a very old man and yet he was capable of working longer days than any of his disciples. He never seemed to get tired. On the contrary, he evoked perceptions of youthfulness and even boyishness in astonished observers. Not only was he seen as childlike in his innocence and directness, he was paradoxically also seen as always being in control of whatever the situation was. His extraordinary performances of presenting highly challenging notions to live audiences with evident success and control, and his extraordinary capability of dealing with hostility and tension evoked wonder and appreciation in devotees.

It is in this context that one should view the ideas of status difference and ritual purity. That Prabhupāda was able to keep an astoundingly high standard of ritual purity with regard to diet and personal habits made him seem extraordinary in yet another way. That he had natural authority and spontaneously commanded extraordinary deference also made him a highly unusual and unique individual.

It is precisely these kinds of contradictory images of age-old wisdom combined with boyish innocence, or utter meticulousness and deliberateness combined with an unusual kind of spontaneity and wit that evoked an undefined intuition of “complete difference” from anything with which his devotees were familiar. This perception was no doubt augmented by his physical features. One must not forget that Prabhupāda always dressed in Indian clothes, shaved his head, wore *tilaka*, extensively quoted the Sanskrit phrases in his lectures and meticulously followed Indian eating habits. In other words, he was “exotic” by any and all standards.

In Goffmanian terms, this “exoticness” was founded upon, firstly, perceptions of stunts: his amazing control in personal morality, states of mind and interpersonal dealings. Prabhupāda was seemingly able to manipulate his audiences with ease. Secondly, evidence exists of what Goffman calls ‘tension of frames’, by which he means cognitions in which two or more frameworks impinge on each other. For instance, Prabhupāda’s childlikeness was an attention-demanding issue simply because he happened to be over seventy years old. His character also seemed simultaneously youthful and age-old. This produces a tension of two different social frames, one concerning the elderly, one concerning children and youth. One might also add the tension of frames produced by Prabhupāda’s Indian habits and dress in the Western milieu.

All these elements are founded upon violations of tacit expectations concerning social behaviour. However, all the items listed so far are concerned with rather superficial violations of social conventions and the like. Therefore, it is instructive to examine how deep these elements of surprise go. In the following section, I will analyse the ways in which Prabhupāda’s person was seen to violate more deeply embedded ontological intuitions.

## SECTION SEVEN

# The deep structure of charismatic representations

The foundational element in devotees' perceptions of Prabhupāda was that of surprise. On this feature, all available sources speak unanimously: Prabhupāda's acts and behaviour elicited surprise, astonishment and — very often — admiration. One can safely say that Prabhupāda's appearance, speech, behaviour and interaction easily commanded heightened attention in Western contexts, even from outsiders. Even if this consisted of nothing more than unusual convictions and unusual personal habits (morality, dress, diet, etc.). He was likely something of an enigma to most people who came into contact with him. In addition to exotic appearance, Prabhupāda evidently was highly skilful in interpersonal dealings and his managerial skills were admirable by any standards. His theological convictions also set him apart from millions of contemporaries: in the midst of a technological race to conquer space, Prabhupāda believed in Purāṇic cosmology with absolute certainty.

Considering the scale of Prabhupāda's preaching missions, clearly large numbers of people also dismissed him as an oddity. No doubt his views were off-putting for many who came into contact with him but were too tactful to openly confront him. Thus, I am not arguing that people would inevitably perceive Prabhupāda as possessed of a mystical charisma. Only a small percentage of his audiences ever came to that conclusion. The perception of charisma depends ultimately on the perceiver him- or herself; something must be added to the observation by the observer in order to perceive the charisma. Prabhupāda himself provided only the initial triggers, so to speak, here analysed as consisting of certain attention-demanding elements of his behaviour.

In the end, Prabhupāda came to be perceived as charismatic by a considerable number of people, some of whom became his formally initiated disciples. They soon learned to represent him in special ways. In this section I will examine

more closely the structure of charismatic representations that Prabhupāda evoked in his followers.

### 7.1 Unknowability of the guru's mind

The first thing that strikes one in the way Prabhupāda is repeatedly represented is the theme of ultimate unknowability of Prabhupāda's identity. All the writers here consider it axiomatic that one can never come to fully understand who Prabhupāda was. Satsvarūpa declares that "[t]he only personality who can fully appreciate the biography of Śrīla Prabhupāda is Kṛṣṇa Himself" (1979a, 12).

This insistence on the notion of being incapable of fully conceiving the nature of the spiritual master is crucial for the specifically religious appreciation of Prabhupāda to arise. A clear difference exists between considering Prabhupāda's interpersonal skills, ritual purity, convictions, knowledge on theological matters, energy, youthfulness, style of dress, etc., as exceptional, and concluding that they are evidence of a hidden, unknowable dimension of Prabhupāda's being. In making the latter conclusion, one shifts into a more properly religious frame of reference. In other words, one may see Prabhupāda's different qualities as unusual, surprising and even admirable, and yet conclude that these qualities stemmed from his individual psychological make-up, life-long conditioning in Hindu values, childhood experiences, etc. According to this line of thought, one could understand Prabhupāda's character in principle, if one merely was willing to go through the trouble of finding out the relevant background information on him.

But this is clearly not the direction of thought favoured by the devotees. Their conclusion is quite the opposite: no matter how much information one acquires on Prabhupāda, one is still absolutely unable to gain a full understanding of him. As Satsvarūpa explains:

Mundane biographers would like to speculate and present their psychological theories on the life of Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda; why he waited, prepared himself, and then left for America with virtually no support or much chance for success. But the movement of persons completely surrendered to the *guru* and Kṛṣṇa cannot be understood by such speculative methods. It is a fact that the Absolute Truth, Supreme Personality of Godhead, cannot be known by material argument or sensual inspection, and similarly the servant of the Absolute Truth can also never be known by any means except devotion ... (Satsvarūpa 1979a, 6-7.)

There is an absolute unanimity among devotees on this issue. The theological logic behind the assertion is obvious: just as one cannot come to know God through senses and intellect, one cannot come to know God's representative through such methods. Hayagrīva states his case simply and forcefully in the



preface of his book dealing with the early years of ISKCON: “Prabhupāda’s real identity defied analysis” (1985, xii). One devotee expresses this as follows:

Everything he ever did was unlimited. No one could understand the depths of Prabhupāda’s actions or his words. They are inconceivable. [...] Because I could never understand Śrīla Prabhupāda, therefore I could not even begin to conceive of how to associate with him personally. (Quoted in Satsvarūpa 1996, 185.)

These views are undoubtedly also consciously and explicitly held in the movement. They are sanctioned by Prabhupāda himself. Tamal Krishna backs up his discussion by quoting from Prabhupāda’s own writings:

The spiritual master knows very well how to engage each disciple in a particular duty, but if a disciple, thinking himself more advanced than his spiritual master, gives up his orders and acts independently, he checks his own spiritual progress. Every disciple must consider himself completely unaware of the science of Kṛṣṇa and must always be ready to carry out the orders of the spiritual master to become competent in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. A disciple should always remain a fool before his spiritual master. (Tamal 1984, 480, quoting Cc. Ādi 7.72 purport).

As becomes clear in the above quotation, this framework of perceiving the spiritual master is part of the movement’s normative ideology. It is considered an offence to think one fully knows and understands the motives of the spiritual master.

Not only is the guru’s identity and life history beyond analysis, the fundamental, explicitly articulated premise of the guru-disciple relationship is that the disciple cannot know the guru’s *mind*. As Satsvarūpa expresses it, “[o]ne cannot know the mind of the spiritual master” (1991, 219). Bhūrijana writes:

Do not imagine that his dealings are based on superficialities — likes or dislikes. Dealings between *guru* and disciple are deep and are meant for the disciple’s welfare. In addition it is not possible for a disciple to understand the depth of consciousness that motivates his spiritual master’s actions. (1996, 62.)

In other words, the disciple should not attempt to read ordinary human intentions and motives behind the actions of the guru. And if the disciples are considered unable to understand Prabhupāda, for outsiders it is even more difficult to grasp who he is.

This principle of unknowability of the guru is to be adhered to even if it sometimes causes puzzlement. The spiritual master’s successive orders to a devo-

tee, or his orders to two different devotees may be diametrically opposite, yet it is not the disciple's business to speculate on the reasons behind this apparent inconsistency. His or her duty is simply to obey (Satsvarūpa 1991, 300).

Prabhupāda himself was also keen on keeping his disciples' inquisitiveness concerning his internal life within certain limits. Once, when Prabhupāda was on a walk, one of his disciples took advantage of the situation and asked him about his internal life. Prabhupāda is reported to have sharply replied "*That* you do not require!" The disciple, however, insisted: "[b]ut Prabhupāda, it would be interesting to know about your personal, intimate relationship with Lord Kṛṣṇa". Prabhupāda is said to have stopped walking, facing the questioner and repeating the denial very forcefully. (Vedavyāsa 1996, 230-231.)

Prabhupāda instilled and cultivated in his disciples an attitude of ignorance and uncertainty in relation to himself. This attitude was to be especially cultivated during lectures. One certainly should put questions to one's spiritual master, but there are limits in terms of how they should be expressed. Bhūrijana tells of a lecture in which Prabhupāda had been relaying stories about giant eagles that fly from planet to planet, eat elephants and hatch their eggs in outer space. One student very hesitantly expressed how the story seemed "a little hard to believe". Prabhupāda is reported to have answered: "What do you know? You are still within the womb of your mother!" (Quoted in Bhūrijana 1996, 258-259.) The mere implication that intelligence could be capable of judging the veracity of sacred scripture, and the judgement of the spiritual master concerning them, is considered extremely offensive.

What all the above examples demonstrate quite unambiguously is that the initial experiences of suspense, surprise and amazement that may be experienced in the presence of the guru are to be cultivated. The freshness of the first impressions are not allowed to be forgotten when one gets to observe one's spiritual master more closely. The spiritual master is never to be taken for granted.

We may call these requirements regarding the guru the 'principle of unknowability'. The idea of not being able to know another person's mind does not seem to obviously violate the intuitive principles that humans typically use in making inferences of other persons. In fact, it is intuitively obvious that we cannot directly perceive the thoughts of another person, and thus, the other's mind necessarily remains beyond our reach. However, intuitive psychology does postulate that others' minds can be known through indirect evidence of actions and speech. To the extent that the principle of unknowability makes these kinds of inferences unacceptable, it does postulate a counterintuitive psychology in the case of gurus. What may seem rather a innocent way of thinking may, in fact, turn out to have major consequences if it manages to set up a counterintuitive concept. The principle of unknowability, then, can be considered a borderline representation between the more intuitive notions of guru's extraordinariness and the more properly counterintuitive, and thus, religious representations.

## 7.2 Violations of intuitive ontology

### 7.2.1 COUNTERINTUITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

The disciple, then, cannot know and should not pry too closely into the workings of the guru's mind. This premise is carefully guarded and often repeated in ISKCON literature. However, the converse side of this asymmetrical relationship is, although not as forcefully thematised, also a recurrent theme. The idea is that while the disciple cannot understand what goes on in the guru's mind, the guru, in turn, knows everything that goes on in the disciple's mind. Now, if there is any doubt regarding the counterintuitiveness of the principle of unknowability, in this case, we have a rather straightforward case of a counterintuitive concept. According to intuitive psychological principles, direct perception of another's mind is impossible.

As was demonstrated in the last section, repeated observations have been made that Prabhupāda was, at least to his disciples, inexplicably skilful in dealing with different people and different audiences. This skill in interpersonal situations is commented upon in a variety of contexts. One of the typical forms in which this observation is expressed is the notion that Prabhupāda was able to "tune into" his audiences. Many devotees recall an uncanny feeling during Prabhupāda's lectures that the words were being addressed directly to themselves. One devotee recalls: "When Prabhupāda gave a lecture, his eyes would wander over the audience while he explained Kṛṣṇa consciousness. You felt that he was preaching directly to you." (Quoted in Vedavyāsa 1996, 131-132.) Another devotee comments on a similar feeling: "[m]any have testified that they found Prabhupāda looked at them and spoke especially to them in his lecture, even though they knew he was speaking to everyone else as well" (quoted in Satsvarūpa 1996, 283).

Sometimes the situations can be depicted as rather dramatic. One devotee has described the situation in which he met Prabhupāda for the first time. To the devotee it seemed that Prabhupāda could actually read his mind. The devotee was given permission to go into Prabhupāda's room while he was having a meeting with more senior disciples. The meeting was in full progress and Prabhupāda was just explaining something called *kṛpana* mentality. Having never heard of the term before, the devotee thought, "what's *kṛpana*?" just to hear Prabhupāda explain "*kṛpana* means miser". The devotee happened to be from a wealthy family and thought of himself as not belonging to the category, and just then Prabhupāda looked directly into his eyes and explained that if one uses one's wealth and abilities for mere sense gratification, it is simply miserly. The devotee decided that Prabhupāda could read his mind and thought defiantly that if Prabhupāda actually was perfect, he should be able to make predictions concerning the future. As if in response to his thoughts, Prabhupāda took a volume of scripture and started reading predictions concerning the age of Kali. The devotee

was stunned. It seemed to him that Prabhupāda was addressing his thoughts one by one even though he did not voice a single one aloud. (Satsvarūpa 1996, 22-23.)

In other words, in some cases devotees came to a conclusion that Prabhupāda literally had the capacity to “read one’s mind”, that is to say, to directly perceive another person’s thoughts, feelings, emotions and volitions without any overt expression of them. Tamal Krishna confirms this notion: “The spiritual master knows thoroughly the heart of his disciple and always endeavours to help the disciple cleanse his heart and make it a fit place for Kṛṣṇa to reside” (Tamal 1984, 41).

This naturally meant that most devotees felt it to be impossible to lie to Prabhupāda. Everything seemed to become exposed under his eyes and his gaze:

Prabhupāda’s glance functioned both as the thunderbolt and the rose. If a devotee went before Śrīla Prabhupāda and he was not entirely honest or open, or if he was trying to bluff his commitment to Kṛṣṇa, Śrīla Prabhupāda could penetrate through all this by a straight gaze into the devotee’s eyes. (Quoted in Satsvarūpa 1996, 230.)

Sometimes this way of perceiving the situation created confusing and painful situations for the devotees. Bhūrijana tells how he felt at a time when Prabhupāda criticised him severely: “I can think of two analogies to describe how this mercy felt: open heart surgery without anaesthesia and Biblical Adam’s attempt to hide from God after he had sinned. I remember feeling I had no shelter and nowhere to hide.” (Bhūrijana 1996, 176.) In other words, Prabhupāda’s gaze, in addition to being capable of “penetrating” into one’s soul, was also “all-seeing”. For the disciple, there is nothing that can be hidden from one’s spiritual master. The guru knows everything that is in one’s mind.

This special access to others’ minds sets up characteristic speculation in the case of seemingly irrational behaviour of the guru. Hayagrīva describes a situation in which a devotee working as the editor of the *Back to Godhead* magazine receives harsh criticism from Prabhupāda because the painting on the cover of a certain magazine depicts Arjuna as too dark-complexioned. Prabhupāda is furious at the idea that Arjuna, a great warrior, is depicted as black as a *śūdra*. The devotee tried to explain that the girl who painted the picture was new in the movement and did not know how to paint Arjuna, so she had copied the features from some other painting. This explanation only increased Prabhupāda’s annoyance. After the scolding, the devotees speculated among themselves why Prabhupāda had gotten so upset over one seemingly small mistake. Someone suggests that maybe Arjuna himself was offended. Hayagrīva comments on the events:

No one knows what to say. When a disciple is scolded, we don’t always see the reason behind it. To us, the rebuke may seem arbitrary, but we know

that Prabhupāda sees the totality. Ultimately, chastisement is for the devotee's benefit. It is Prabhupāda's mercy disguised. (Hayagrīva 1985, 329.)

The disciple is actually supposed to live in perpetual uncertainty in relation to his or her guru. Satsvarūpa describes how he once received a long, detailed, philosophical letter from Prabhupāda. Such personal acts were rare in a movement of hundreds of disciples and Satsvarūpa was surprised at this unexpected blessing. What had apparently caught Prabhupāda's interest was a report he had sent of a meeting the devotees had had in which they discussed Rāmakrishna's philosophy. Satsvarūpa comments on the situation that "[a] disciple never knows exactly which of his acts will please his spiritual master" (1991, 218). The spiritual master should not be expected to be predictable or consistent in his responses. Sometimes one receives positive attention for seemingly no reason at all and sometimes it may seem that great sacrifices and services that one has performed go unnoticed by the spiritual master. One still has to trust the spiritual master's superior judgement in these matters.

Satsvarūpa is also careful to point out that not only is encouragement and praise from the spiritual master to be considered blessings; the blessing may also come in the form of a criticism. Whatever attention one gets from the spiritual master is to be considered as beneficial. As Satsvarūpa puts it: "We should always regard our spiritual master's words as absolute and in our best interest" (1991, 223). In addition to knowing everything that the disciple has in his or her mind, the spiritual master also knows the disciple's interests better than the disciple him- or herself.

As the close reading of these quotes makes evident, the guru should be simultaneously considered completely unknowable, capable of seeing into one's mind and always acting for the disciple's benefit. The guru is therefore an all-seeing, mysterious and absolutely benevolent being, no matter what one's senses and reason indicate. The thrill, anticipation, hesitation, attentiveness and surrender generated by the attitude of unknowing trust in the benevolence of the guru's actions is perhaps most vividly expressed by Satsvarūpa:

You may sometimes have different intimations about the future plans your spiritual master has planned for you. You cannot always anticipate these, but you may try to understand his mind. [...] Nor can you even say you know your spiritual master's plan for you when he gives you a particular order. His order may be the first in a series of steps the spiritual master is going to lead you through. [...] Your job is not to speculate whether your spiritual master actually knows your best interests. You must assume he does and with eager submission follow his instructions. (Satsvarūpa 1991, 299-300.)

### 7.2.2 COUNTERINTUITIVE PHYSICS

The counterintuitive psychology of the guru postulates that the guru can in some unspecified way perceive the contents of the disciple's mind. The previous examples were taken from situations in which the disciple was physically present with the guru. The examples described situations where disciples were listening to Prabhupāda's lectures, receiving his chastisement or just simply talking with him. But how can one account for the situation of the guru being able to perceive the contents of the disciple's mind from the other side of the world?

Satsvarūpa describes his feelings upon receiving a letter from India in which Prabhupāda took up the subject of making a big mistake in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Satsvarūpa naturally tried to figure out to what Prabhupāda was referring. Was there a subtle warning for him of something? He did not think he had made any such mistakes recently, and therefore concluded that Prabhupāda was warning him about the future. "Prabhupāda was reading my mind, looking with his transcendental vision from India to Boston" (1991, 134). Prabhupāda's powers of perception are here clearly assumed to transcend time and place. This is a second form of violation of intuitive principles concerning how human perception works. Not only is Prabhupāda assumed to perceive other people's minds, he can also do this without being physically near the disciple. Thus, one is led to the question of whether Prabhupāda's person is assumed to violate intuitive physics in more obvious ways.

Tamal Krishna relates an incident which illustrates a characteristic interpretation devotees often attach to significant events in their lives. During the fall of 1969 Prabhupāda was helping to set up a temple and beginning the European mission in London. He requested Tamal Krishna to come to London to help him. Tamal Krishna was advised by the local devotees to wear ordinary clothes, use his secular name and present himself as a tourist when dealing with immigration officers. However, somehow the disguise failed and the suspicious officers phoned the person he had given as his contact in London. Unfortunately, someone who did not know of these arrangements answered the call and revealed that Tamal Krishna was actually a religious preacher coming to help his spiritual master organise European missions. When the officers discovered this, they checked Tamal Krishna's luggage and found a psychiatrist's letter addressed to the U.S. government draft officers declaring Tamal Krishna a highly maladjusted individual. By this time, Tamal Krishna was beginning to get desperate about meeting his spiritual master, and so he began to pray to Prabhupāda. Shortly afterwards, he was escorted to meet a doctor, who, surprisingly, after a long discussion, evaluated him fit to enter the country. (Tamal 1984, 217-221.)

When Tamal Krishna later related to other devotees the reason for his delay, everyone was surprised at the perceptiveness of the officials. It seemed obvious to devotees that the ordeal was Kṛṣṇa's test of Tamal Krishna's dedication to Prabhupāda. Tamal Krishna then "realized that whatever was taking place was happening only by Śrīla Prabhupāda's causeless mercy" (Tamal 1984, 221). The

story suggests that ultimately the guru is an unseen agent and choreographer of these kinds of events. The guru is therefore represented as capable of influencing people and events from a distance in a mysterious way.

Another devotee declares that if disciples lose their humbleness and become too proud, thinking themselves Prabhupāda's favourite or in any way special, Prabhupāda will surely arrange some circumstance to humble them (quoted in Satsvarūpa 1996, 206). The term "arrange" implicates more than just physical means. Prabhupāda himself once stated to his disciples that his own guru had arranged for them to be born in America just to assist him in his preaching mission (Tamal 1984, 406). How exactly anyone can arrange for the conditions of birth of specific individuals is not explored further. The guru is repeatedly represented as a very special kind of agent, capable of controlling physical nature in a way that clearly violates intuitive principles.

One of the most common ways in which this special nature of the guru's agency is expressed is through stories of conversion. Meeting one's guru is not considered an ordinary occurrence or accidental. Hayagrīva tells how it seemed inexplicably significant to him that he journeyed to India in search of a guru on the very same boat that Prabhupāda had come to America. In fact he left for India in October 1965, just when Prabhupāda had arrived! His search in India was fruitless, however. He only met Prabhupāda in New York after he came back from India. When he related this coincidence to Prabhupāda, the latter reinforced the notion of mystery: "It was all Krishna's arrangement." The often-repeated theological notion is that when the disciple is ready, God will send a guru. The details of the event are always considered highly significant. (Hayagrīva 1985, 24.)

A very significant theme in these kinds of representations is that they tend to change one's whole conception of agency in one's life. The events of one's life are interpreted in such a fashion as to diminish one's own subjectivity and powers of control. One's life is seen to be shaped by forces much greater than oneself, one of them being the guru's will. Tamal Krishna summarises his own entry into discipleship with a characteristic attitude:

Analyzing my own life, I could see that only by the impelling force of Śrīla Prabhupāda's pure desire had I been induced to take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. True, I had been materially frustrated, such frustration being a suitable precondition for spiritual life. But it was Prabhupāda, out of his causeless mercy, who had picked me up even though I was at first unwilling. It was by his order that the devotees had chanted in Tompkins Square Park the day I first met them. It was by his mercy that he had visited Morning Star Ranch — a visit that had left the people there chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. It was because of his recording of the *mahā-mantra*, which I had sung along with because of his disciple's invitation, that I had come to the San Francisco temple. And ultimately, it was his personal presence which had finally made me surrender. (Tamal 1984, 246.)

Sometimes the idea of Prabhupāda's mysterious influence over life's significant events leads to a stronger form of counterintuitive representations in which Prabhupāda is actually experienced as being present with the disciple in a non-material form. Tamal Krishna describes how the challenges of his arduous missionary work in Europe in 1970 were inspired by the presence of Prabhupāda felt by he and his wife at that time. Although Prabhupāda was physically located in North America, they felt his presence vividly during their daily devotions:

While the rest of Paris remained deep in slumber, my wife and I sat on the floor between the dresser-altar and bed and chanted [...]. Afterward, while my wife prepared milk and fruit, I would read from Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. This was my satisfaction. Though thousands of miles away from my spiritual master, I felt his presence strongly by conducting this simple worship. It did not require large temple, or even his physical presence. I could associate with him by chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and reading his books. (Ibid., 315.)

In an especially lively description, Tamal Krishna relates how the devotees were challenged and harassed by the locals during street *saṅkīrtan* in Hamburg's famous district around Reeperbahn. The area is famous for its nightlife with its bars, clubs, prostitutes and criminals. Yet, in an act of confrontation, Tamal Krishna leads his group of chanting devotees directly through the area. And the response is as they expected:

And these lifetimers of the Reeperbahn were ready to let us know how they felt. From out of the bars came bouncers, burley-chested and strong-armed, kicking at us as we danced down the street, like maddened dogs attacking a trespasser. From overhead we were assailed by missiles — rocks and flowerpots, hurled down upon us by loud-swearing prostitutes. We were sneered at, ridiculed, harassed. (Ibid., 296.)

However, Tamal sees the challenge of singing God's name in the presence of such a ritually impure population as an ultimate test of sincerity. It was certainly not required of them, and as he says, no one would have been blamed had they not gone there. But the devotees were not going to give up easily. They decided to go there again the following night, "prepared with unwavering determination" (ibid.). This time they came with a toughened mood. To demonstrate their militaristic attitude, they goose-stepped in marked precision, copying what they had seen in films depicting Germans during World War II. Thus, they attempted to show that they stood against the sinners with the strength of their convictions. As by a miracle, the strategy seemed to effect a total change in attitude: "The bouncers began cheering, the customers applauded." The reason for



this appreciation was unclear, but the main thing was achieved: Hare Kṛṣṇa was being chanted and people were appreciative. “Amidst their terrible acts they were somehow accruing a small spiritual benefit” (ibid., 297). Even more significant is that by these acts of bravery on behalf of their spiritual master, the devotees experienced that he was actually with them, watching and protecting them (ibid., 296).

Bhūrijana together with his wife was sent on an extremely arduous preaching mission to Hong Kong in 1970. Because they lived on donations, money was in short supply. When they attempted to move from the guest house they were living in to a rented flat, the deal somehow fell through and they were unable get their deposit back for two weeks, leaving them with only four Hong Kong dollars. They were completely broke, but somehow they managed to survive:

During those two weeks, all my anxiety about money stopped. How could I be anxious about money when I had none? Every day during those two weeks, someone from somewhere would come with vegetables, rice, and wheat flour. Or someone would bring cooked chickpea *prasādam* from a temple or invite us to take *prasādam* at their home. All our necessities were supplied. Even our rent was paid by an Indian shop owner who had seen us chanting in a nearby park. We didn’t ask him to pay the rent, but he asked us to allow him to do this service. Slowly the fact dawned on me: Kṛṣṇa was actually protecting us, His insignificant, naive, immature servants who were trying to please Prabhupāda. (Bhūrijana 1996, 75.)

Fortuitous coincidences, such as people who mysteriously help the devotees in times of trouble or spontaneous gifts that come when most urgently needed, are naturally memorable, command attention and invite exegesis. Under these circumstances, it is quite understandable how one might come to make the inference that Prabhupāda, or, as in this case, Kṛṣṇa, is the hidden agent working behind the scenes, protecting the devotees.

Not only extreme situations provoke strong feelings of Prabhupāda’s presence. One devotee who had read all of Prabhupāda’s books four or five times, says that he feels that he is actually with Prabhupāda when reading his books (quoted in Satsvarūpa 1996, 61). Similarly, book distribution on the streets was always very much appreciated by Prabhupāda and many devotees experience that specific form of service as bringing them close to Prabhupāda:

When someone goes on saṅkīrtana and distributes books, he experiences a higher taste from the book distribution and that’s Prabhupāda’s presence. [...] By distributing Prabhupāda’s books or rendering any service personally he is tasting his relationship with Prabhupāda. (Quoted in Satsvarūpa, 167-168.)

In theological teaching, the spiritual master is present wherever his sincere disciple is trying to serve his instructions. Therefore, this can also be turned into an injunction to follow. Satsvarūpa, for instance, stresses the instrumental value of such a belief, even if it is not experientially obvious to the disciple. The point is that the disciples naturally acted in a special way when they were in Prabhupāda's presence. When Prabhupāda entered the room, everyone would offer their obeisances. When he addressed the disciples, everything would suddenly become very serious. In Prabhupāda's presence, "everything became pinpointed", and one would become more alert, attentive and careful. He may suddenly have said something that would influence the rest of the disciple's life. By thinking that Prabhupāda actually is present, one recreates in oneself all these beneficial devotional attitudes. Thus the injunction: "For the rest of our life, we should always be speaking *as if* Prabhupāda is hearing, and acting *as if* Prabhupāda is seeing. We should be very determined to please him." (Satsvarūpa 1979, 54-55, my emphasis.) The attitude is cautious. Prabhupāda is not said to actually be present. Rather, the idea is that it is useful to think so whether this is actually believed or experienced to be the case or not.

Still, it may be worth emphasising that what we have here is not an article of faith postulating supernatural abilities of the guru to see, hear, influence events and actually be present in multiple locations simultaneously. The representations are generally deeply embedded in very tangible experiences involving heightened expectation, self-awareness and emotions, such as anxiety, fear, joy, exhilaration and bliss, aroused by unusual circumstances and surprising turns of events. It is precisely the combination of heightened emotions, challenging situations and surprising turns of events that typically triggers extended commentary and reflection dealing with counterintuitive representations of the guru.

Prabhupāda was never advertised as a miracle maker. He himself strongly disapproved of yogic displays of paranormal powers exhibited by some other Indian holy men. His theological position was that the essence of spiritual life is not in achieving such powers; nor were these to be considered proofs of one's holiness. All such displays were of secondary importance. We have already seen that Prabhupāda discouraged exaggerated displays of ecstasy and religious experience. Similarly, miraculous occurrences are not the primary focus of interest in ISKCON and are certainly not the main interest in preaching activities. As we have seen, the focus is on religious knowledge and its acceptance, not supernatural displays of power. This aspect of the representations, when held in the form of theological beliefs, tends to be viewed cautiously. And yet it is unmistakably found in most writings describing interactions with Prabhupāda.

### 7.3 Essentialism

Prabhupāda, then, is represented as a very special kind of being. He is seen as capable of performing feats that are highly counterintuitive and thus attention-demanding. More formally, it is a question of a specific category of person with counterintuitive psychology and counterintuitive physics. His mind is able to perceive another person's mental contents, and he is capable of influencing physical events from a long distance. The most rudimentary form in which these counterintuitive features are expressed are in spontaneous apprehensions of Prabhupāda's difference and emotional impact.

These twin themes of Prabhupāda being strangely different from anyone else and at the same time having a felt impact on the people around him are captured in the often repeated image of "effulgence". Prabhupāda is often seen quite literally as emitting some kind of almost tangible, visible substance. One devotee who was receiving Prabhupāda at the Paris airport recalls how the whole airport seemed transformed by Prabhupāda's presence: "For me the sound of Śrīla Prabhupāda's name and his imminent arrival transformed the airport. A mystical light seemed to illuminate everything." (Vedavyāsa 1996, 131.) Others present represent him similarly:

Transmitting a mood of intense humility and gratitude, he was just like the rays of sunshine illuminating darkness (ibid., 175).

His greatness seemed accentuated by his small physical stature and soft golden effulgence (ibid., 176).

These ways of speaking may be interpreted as metaphorical: in the eyes of devotion, he differed from all other people so much that it was *as if* Prabhupāda shone with mystical light. However, sometimes this metaphorical way of speaking shifts to a literal one. One devotee trying to take photographs of Prabhupāda recalls having had difficulties with lighting. Everything suddenly seemed brighter than usual. "Then I looked at Śrīla Prabhupāda and saw that he was radiant, as if a golden effulgence were emanating from him" (ibid., 234). The movement's gossip reported even outsiders commenting on the phenomenon. Two police officers passing Prabhupāda on the street were reported to have exclaimed in astonishment "Look, that man is glowing!" (ibid., 234).

One could hardly find a more graphic illustration of charisma: Prabhupāda is repeatedly represented as literally emitting some kind of spiritual substance in the form of "effulgence" around him, and this in turn is conceived as having perceivable and tangible effects on its recipients. Distinct from the previously analysed counterintuitive psychology, here the impact Prabhupāda has on others clearly stems from an impersonal "power" or "essence" that he is claimed to pos-

sess. The closest category of counterintuitiveness we have is the notion of counterintuitive biology, since we are dealing with a notion of a person emitting light.

There are other interesting indications for a quasi-biological basis for these phenomena. One devotee who hosted Prabhupāda on his Hamburg visit accompanied him on his morning walks. One time, when the weather was rainy, he spread his jacket on a park bench for Prabhupāda to sit on. The devotee comments: “[w]hen he actually accepted my humble offering, I was overjoyed and later wore the jacket until it was almost in shreds” (quoted in Vedavyasa 1996, 44). What this suggests is that devotees, quite early on and possibly quite spontaneously, thought of Prabhupāda in terms of some kind of mostly invisible contagious essence. Everything Prabhupāda touched, used or wore was thought to literally catch some of this mysterious substance.

In addition to contagiousness, let us consider the notion of defilement. Touch or contact is generally thought to have defiling effects. However, since Prabhupāda is a “pure devotee”, it is clearly inadmissible to think of him in terms of dirt and impurities. Accordingly, what is being transmitted by Prabhupāda’s touch is not impurity but — somewhat counterintuitively — an extraordinary degree of purity. He is then seen as a sort of purifying agent. A chemical or biological model clearly stands at the base of these notions.

However, the difference between notions based on a physicalistic imagery of “energy” or “vibrations” is slight. Tamal Krishna observes that Prabhupāda’s living quarters were very special to himself and other devotees. Since Prabhupāda was a pure devotee, everywhere such a person goes becomes a “place of pilgrimage”. Thus, Prabhupāda’s room is a sacred place where he carried out “Kṛṣṇa conscious pastimes”. For this reason the room should not be in anyone else’s use even when Prabhupāda is absent. Describing an incident in which the devotees had allowed someone to use Prabhupāda’s room in the Los Angeles temple, Tamal Krishna notes that an important principle had been violated:

Although previously it had simply been an empty room in an abandoned church, it was now being maintained by the spiritual energy of the Lord, and as such was no longer part of this material world. We had permitted a mundane person to use Śrīla Prabhupāda’s room. [...] Things used by the spiritual master, especially his room, bed, sitting place, and shoes, are fully worshipable and should not be used by anyone else. (Tamal 1984, 164.)

This principle was also something the devotees often claimed to be able to perceive. In another context, Tamal Krishna writes that “everything within the room seemed surcharged with spiritual energy on account of Prabhupāda’s presence” (Tamal 1984, 222). Satsvarūpa, writing about the New York temple on 26 Second Avenue, states that “Prabhupāda’s room was as precious to me as the inner sanctums were to Egyptian kings. It was filled with intense vibrations of his familiar love for us” (1991, 45).

At other times, the images change into mental ones, dealing with moods and emotional atmosphere. Hayagrīva describes how Prabhupāda seemed to affect the atmosphere of the places he visited. In 1967, Prabhupāda was recovering from a heart stroke at a beach bungalow in California that the devotees had rented for him. Prabhupāda's fragile health seemed to increase his charisma: "Now more than ever, we sense in his presence that indefinable something — illusive, magnetic, unique, majestic. Walking slowly and quietly into the beach house, he evokes love and reverence." (1985, 200.) The place did not turn out to be a very good choice for Prabhupāda after all. Sunshine was scarce; the mountain range blocked the morning sun, and by midday, the clouds and fog increased. Prabhupāda was also unhappy at being so far away from the temple and its devotees. Solitude was not to his liking. And yet, Prabhupāda's charisma was palpable:

At times, when I look out the window and see the ocean rolling in, then turn and see Swamijī sitting on the couch, and the picture of Jagannatha Puri temple hanging on the wall behind him, it seems that we are actually in Jagannatha Puri. Swamijī always transports his own atmosphere. (Hayagrīva 1985, 214.)

Devotees were always capable of perceiving this subtle change in atmosphere everywhere Prabhupāda went. The places and objects that had come into contact with him were considered sanctified. There is, however, another interesting side to the issue. Unable to clearly pin down what exactly was the cause of these effects, the disciples were attentive to every single detail of Prabhupāda's behaviour. The mystery of the background feeling Prabhupāda carried with him prompted devotees to look for indirect signs of transcendental consciousness:

But if one looks carefully, he can perceive certain subtle, transcendental marks: Swamijī's large ears, shaped like a Buddha's. [...] And the myriad expressions of his eyes, displaying the whole range of human sentiments — love, devotion, tolerance, disapproval, humor, sympathy, fervor — as well as transcendental emotions unfamiliar to us. And his natural, aristocratic gestures. [...] The more we acquire devotion to him, the more his unique features and qualities manifest, and we come to see him as purely transcendental personality. (Hayagrīva 1985, 88.)

Sometimes they made far-reaching inferences based on their observations. Bhūrijana tells of how after he had just met Prabhupāda he got a chance to accompany him on his morning walk. Traffic was light and upon coming to a crossroads with red lights, Bhūrijana observed how Prabhupāda simply walked directly across the street as traffic permitted. Bhūrijana's inference is that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is practical, since Prabhupāda did not follow the letter of the law and stop at red lights, but chose the more common-sense course. (Bhūrijana 1996, 7.)

Devotees were eager to see Prabhupāda's eating habits. Tamal Krishna relates how he observed keenly how Prabhupāda ate his food:

I watched as Prabhupāda sampled each item on his plate. Having familiarized himself with the different tastes, he proceeded to mix small portions of each in different combinations and then again sometimes eat them separately. I tried as best I could to follow exactly, bite by bite, so that I could learn the art of eating properly. I was surprised how slowly Prabhupāda ate. He was relishing the *prasādam* as nondifferent from Kṛṣṇa. (Tamal 1984, 89.)

Prabhupāda's way of eating was of course a lesson in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, since the food had been offered to Kṛṣṇa, and it is thus natural that devotees should try to learn to honour such food appropriately. But the main interest in these stories is that devotees tended to pick up everything. Satsvarūpa confirms that this attitude is appropriate:

*Ācārya* means one who teaches by example. [...] Whatever Śrīla Prabhupāda did was instructive: the way he ate, the way he walked, the way he dressed, the way he lay down, the way he breathed, the way he moved. Everything a great soul does should be carefully studied — not imitated, but understood and followed. It's meant to be followed. (Satsvarūpa 1979a, 67.)

Despite Satsvarūpa's warnings that Prabhupāda should not be imitated, this attention to detail has sometimes resulted in curious side-effects. As Satsvarūpa (1991, 200) noted, many devotees adopted Prabhupāda's mannerisms. Especially the older American devotees now speak with an Indian accent and display many of Prabhupāda's gestures like turning one's head or moving one's hand in a certain way.

## 7.4 Conclusion

All these representations — the notion of mysterious “effulgence” or “light” emitted by Prabhupāda's person; the notion of a contagious spiritual substance transmitted by touch or presence; and the idea that his physical appearance and details of behaviour are direct signs of this transcendental essence and are capable of being acquired by imitation — are typical of what is more formally known as essentialistic representations. They invariably depend on the concept of a hidden nature or essence that in some unspecified manner accounts for all perceivable features of a person or an object.

In addition, the essentialistic representations of Prabhupāda are more or less closely connected with representations of counterintuitiveness and unknow-

ability. The principle of unknowability, in fact, is in clear continuation of essentialistic notions, which depend on an unknown or hidden dimension of the object or person in question. The counterintuitive representations likewise depend on the idea of a “soul-substance” or “spirit-essence” of some kind as a medium. If the mental contents of a person are represented as a sort of immaterial substance, it becomes understandable how they could be perceived by special agents. The idea of influencing physical events from a distance also seems to require (or at least is supported by) the idea of a medium for some kind of generally unperceivable substance.

## SECTION EIGHT

### Ritual frame and its vulnerability

In the previous section, a broad spectrum of religious representations in terms of which Prabhupāda was perceived was presented. Especially noteworthy are the instances of counterintuitiveness and essentialism that are ubiquitous in devotees' representations of Prabhupāda. Essentialistic notions postulate an unknowable, hidden essence to Prabhupāda, which is responsible for a wide variety of special features. His standing out from the rest of humanity, emitting a mysterious “effulgence” around him and seeming ability to affect people around him in remarkable ways can all be accounted for by the notion of “spiritual essence”. While there is nothing specifically religious about essentialism as such — it is found in a wide variety of representations humans typically have — matters become more complicated when they are clearly combined with ideas that are counterintuitive. It is the latter representations that give the essentialistic notions their unmistakably religious flavour.

The religious representations in turn are founded upon actual interactions with Prabhupāda that usually involved an observed violation of the devotee's deeply rooted primary frameworks, as was shown in section 5. Of the primary frame violations, as listed by Goffman, evidence was shown for what Goffman calls ‘stunts’; that is to say, Prabhupāda seemed to have a surprising ability to maintain control in a variety of challenging situations. The milder forms of conflicting perceptions of Prabhupāda, as when he is simultaneously seen as a wise old man and a childlike boy, would be categorised as ‘tension of frames’. There were also several cases that could be included in the category of ‘fortuitousness’; i.e. socially significant events produced incidentally. Furthermore, the cases of counterintuitiveness reported in the previous section clearly belong to Goffman's category of the ‘astounding complex’. The defining feature of this category is that it suggests new kinds of forces and/or agents existing in the world. And as we saw, the agency attributed to Prabhupāda was obviously of a highly exceptional kind.

Thus, what I am arguing here is that Prabhupāda's charisma was mainly founded upon primary frame violations. Taken as a primary focus of interest and reflection by the devotees, such events ultimately resulted in the characteristic



religious representations analysed in section 6. What this means is that the origins of devotees' perceptions of charisma lie in their pan-human cognitive apparatus. Most people are likely to form similar representations spontaneously, when presented with similar kinds of events. Conscious reflection may — and in most cases does — interfere with the process so that not everyone is likely to reach the same conclusions with regard to Prabhupāda's charisma. The point I have been trying to establish is that the origin does not lie in the movement's culture or processes of socialisation.

Having said this, we may, however, inquire further into the role of cultural ideas in the process. Although the ultimate origin of charismatic perceptions lies in pan-human cognitive processes, one may still argue that surely these perceptions are either rejected or reinforced by tradition, sacred scriptures and movement authorities. As I argued in the introduction, the nature of the materials analysed is such that it has normative status in the movement. The books analysed here were written by senior disciples of the movement, who are now, in most cases, in positions of authority. In other words, the ideas presented are for the most part endorsed by the official theology of the movement. The next question therefore is: What happens when these kinds of highly unusual representations become part of the movement's culture — that is to say, widely shared and distributed within the social circles of ISKCON? The argument I am going to put forward here is that this process is best understood in terms of phenomena connected with *secondary frames*. In Goffmanian terminology, 'keying' includes phenomena such as play, fantasy, drama, ceremonies, rituals, experiments, demonstrations and regroundings. 'Fabrications' include such things as deceit, hoaxes, vital tests and paternal constructions.

In contrast to primary frames, which are deeply entrenched in human cognitive mechanisms, secondary frames are dependent on social interaction and are therefore more vulnerable. One knows how easily a play or a game is disrupted if all the participants do not "play by the rules". Similarly, rituals and ceremonies are easily spoiled by inappropriate conduct. That is why the sacred objects of religions are generally protected by numerous rules and prohibitions. Taboos safeguard the sanctity of sacred paraphernalia, ritual objects and holy books from violation.

Similarly, the religious or ritual frame protecting the devotional perceptions of the guru is extremely vulnerable. This vulnerability, in turn, is counteracted by forceful denials of and norms prohibiting "wrong" interpretations of events. Indications of these can indeed be found in the literature. In what follows, the nature of the religious representations concerning Prabhupāda is analysed by looking into the characteristic failures of real life to conform to the religious frame, and the attempts of the devotees to suppress "wrong" interpretations.

### 8.1. The guru's lack of knowledge

From all that has been said above, it may appear that the religious world view of the Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees contains some unusual elements. It would appear that the devotees believed Prabhupāda was, if not quite God himself, then at least very much like Him. Like God, Prabhupāda was apparently believed to be an omnipresent, omniscient, absolutely benevolent being with no ordinary human weaknesses.

If these features were to be consistently and consciously believed, it would have lead to very strange forms of social interaction. For example, if it were to be consistently held that Prabhupāda knows one's mind better than oneself, it should follow that there is no need to inform Prabhupāda about one's plans, wishes, beliefs, etc. Yet there are constant injunctions in the movement literature to be sincere when presenting one's mind to the spiritual master. Why write letters to him if he knows the contents of them before they were written? Yet Prabhupāda held extensive correspondence with his disciples. As it happens, the nature and purpose of the exchange of information between Prabhupāda and his disciples is often commented upon by the devotees.

Prabhupāda wrote his books by dictating them on tape, which the devotees then transcribed and edited for his final corrections and approval. Satsvarūpa used to do the transcription work for him and therefore corresponded extensively with Prabhupāda. Commenting upon one of Prabhupāda's letters, Satsvarupa reflects on the implications of some of his requests concerning certain missing manuscripts:

Disciples are sometimes interested whether their spiritual master can read their minds. Here, however, we see that the relationship between the spiritual master and disciple is not based on mind-reading. If Prabhupāda were to have employed such mystic techniques he could have already seen or acquired the manuscript pages; but he said, "I am in darkness, Where are the papers?"

We should feel we must inform our spiritual master of pertinent matters and inquire from him about our service. We should never think, "Oh, he is a liberated person, so I don't have to tell him. He'll know from Kṛṣṇa in the heart." Out of love the disciple wants to reveal his mind and does not remain passive, thinking that the spiritual master can get knowledge by reading his disciples' minds. (Satsvarūpa 1991, 338.)

In an apparent contradiction to all that has been said before about Prabhupāda's special capacities, Satsvarūpa denies that the relationship of guru and disciple is based on mind-reading. It is worth noting, however, that he does not actually deny that such capacities exist. The point is simply that the disciple should not base his actions on that belief. The tenor of the injunction is that the

disciple should act *as if* Prabhupāda was an ordinary person, while all the while thinking that in reality he is not. What we have here is a contradiction that sets up a very special kind of religious frame. That Prabhupāda insists on his lack of knowledge of certain things is set up as a play act, drama or “sport” (*līlā*) which invites the disciple to also play his or her part for the latter’s own joy and benefit.

In another letter to Satsvarūpa, Prabhupāda refers to a girl who had a restless spirit and liked to follow Prabhupāda from place to place. She did not commit herself to the movement, though, and did not take orders from the temple leaders. Thus, she received some complaints from the authorities. Prabhupāda, however, defends the girl in the letter stating that hearing his lectures is beneficial to her. Prabhupāda goes on to predict that “[t]hat will make her all right in due course of time” (quoted in Satsvarūpa 1991, 309). The prediction apparently didn’t come true, though. Again, very perceptively, Satsvarūpa senses that this could be used to criticise Prabhupāda:

Prabhupāda was always optimistic, making favourable predictions that, in some cases, later appeared to prove failures. How can we understand this? Actually, these predictions did not fail: whatever little Prabhupāda gained was his permanent success. (1991, 313.)

Satsvarūpa then interprets the comment in the letter to be understood as an encouragement for the devotee to attempt to fulfil the favourable prediction. The logic here seems to be that one should not take such predictions at face value. There are always good reasons for Prabhupāda to say the things he does, although the disciple may not always see them.

It is especially noteworthy how much attention devotees paid to such minor inadequacies and mistakes made by Prabhupāda. Bhurijāna (1996, 123) recounts a telling incident that happened during a morning walk in Japan. The incident seems insignificant to an outsider, but to the devotees it is heavy with theological implications. Prabhupāda, Bhurijāna and one other devotee saw a small creature on the road while they were on their walk. Prabhupāda pointed to the creature with the tip of his cane and said: “A scorpion. Be careful.” The other devotee then whispered into Bhurijāna’s ear saying that in fact it was a crab. For an ordinary person such a mistake in zoological knowledge is entirely natural, and usually passes unremarked in biographies. Nobody ordinarily pays attention to such things. In the case of Prabhupāda’s disciples, things were different; for them it posed an important question, which is comprehensible only in a specific religious framework. How could Prabhupāda, a pure devotee who knows the most intimate parts of his disciples’ hearts, make such a trivial mistake? Given the frame of omniscience in which Prabhupāda is perceived, the incident becomes attention-demanding.

In fact, this is an issue that troubled many devotees. A transcript exists of an interesting discussion during a morning walk on April 8, 1975, in Māyāpur. The

discussion begins with questions concerning the nature of a pure devotee. Prabhupāda's response gives the disciples an opportunity to ask what it means when scriptures say that such a person is "perfect":

Prabhupāda: Yes. Pure devotee does not aspire anything, simply to be engaged in loving service of the Lord, wherever it may be. It doesn't matter.  
[break]

Devotee 1: ...they know everything and they're perfect in everything. But sometimes, from our material viewpoint, we see some discrepancies. Just like we think that...

Prabhupāda: Because material viewpoint. The viewpoint is wrong; therefore you find discrepancies.

Devotee 1: So we should think that we have the defect.

Prabhupāda: Yes. Ācārya is explained, bhakti-saṁsanaḥ: "One who's preaching the cult of devotional service, he's ācārya." Then why should you find any discrepancy?

Devotee 1: Because we see... For instance, sometimes the ācārya may seem to forget something or not to know something, so from our point of view, if someone has forgotten, that is...

Prabhupāda: No, no, no. Then...

Devotee 1: ...an imperfection.

Prabhupāda: That is not the... Then you do not understand. Ācārya is not God, omniscient. He is servant of God. His business is to preach bhakti cult. That is ācārya.

Devotee 1: And that is the perfection.

Prabhupāda: That is the perfection. Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Devotee 1: So we have a misunderstanding about what perfection is?

Prabhupāda: Yes. Perfection is here, how he is preaching bhakti cult. That's all. (Morning Walk 1975b.)

Here Prabhupāda is quick to emphasise that *ācārya*, a spiritual master who teaches by example, is not to be equated with God in perfection. Although he is to be considered "perfect", this does not mean that he does not sometimes forget things or not know certain things. Only God is perfect in that sense. *Ācārya* is not omniscient like God. He is perfect in *bhakti*, devotional service. However, there is still some ambiguity, because, as the excerpt shows, there is also a contradictory message that whatever discrepancies one sees are to be considered the observer's mistake. As Prabhupāda soon explains, it is inherent in the hierarchical relationship that the disciple should by definition consider himself a fool before the spiritual master.

Prabhupāda: [...] So a disciple is always in deficiency before his spiritual master. Just like Caitanya Mahāprabhu says, *guru more murkha dekhi karila*

*śāśana*. “My spiritual master saw Me a fool number one. Therefore he has chastised Me.” So disciple should be always ready to be chastised. He should not think that he has become perfect. That is perfection. So long he thinks that he is not perfect—he’s to be chastised—then he’s perfect. And as soon as he thinks that he has become perfect, he’s nonsense immediately, nonsense number one. [Break] ...always to be chastised by the spiritual master for perfection. And if he thinks that now he has become perfect, then he’s a foolish. Caitanya Mahāprabhu said, *guru more murkha dekhi*. “My spiritual master saw Me a fool number one.” Was He fool number one? He’s God Himself. But that is the position. He should remain always a fool number one, ready to be chastised. Then he’s perfect. (Morning Walk 1975b.)

So, if even Caitanya, who is considered an incarnation of God in the movement, considered himself deficient before his own spiritual master, one has arrived at a familiar kind of theological paradox. Was Caitanya perfect or not? He was perfect because he did not consider himself perfect. The idea is common in mystical traditions: “Those who claim to know, don’t. Those who know, do not say so.” It is not surprising that the disciples discussed the issue more than once. In the next example, the question explicitly concerns the scope of the spiritual master’s knowledge. The discussion is worth quoting at length:

Devotee 2: Prabhupāda, in one purport in the Bhagavad-gītā, you write that a disciple of a bona fide spiritual master is supposed to know everything.

Prabhupāda: Yes, if he follows the spiritual master.

Devotee 2: But how could he know...? What does that mean, “everything”?

Prabhupāda: Everything means whatever his guru knows, he should know, that much. Not like God, everything. Within his limit, that’s all. If he tries to understand whatever his guru has said, that much is “everything.” Otherwise, “everything” does not mean that we know everything, like God, like Kṛṣṇa. That is not possible. If he regularly chants and follow the regulative principles, follows the orders of guru, then he knows everything. That’s all. Not very much... Knows everything, then what is the use of reading books when he knows everything? [break] ...everything—except Kṛṣṇa. *Aham... Sarvasya cāham hṛdi sanniviṣṭo* [Bg. 15.15]. He knows past, present, future, everything. You cannot expect anyone to know like Kṛṣṇa, everything.

Devotee 1: Kṛṣṇa says in Bhagavad-gītā that one who knows Him knows everything.

Prabhupāda: Yes. Because if he knows that Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, then he knows everything. That’s all. Not that he should know as Kṛṣṇa. If he... *Yasmin vijñāte sarvam eva vijñātam*... If he accepts Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the Absolute Truth, then he knows everything. That is finish.

Devotee 1: That knowledge itself is...

Prabhupāda: Eh?

Devotee 1: That knowledge itself is complete.

Prabhupāda: Yes.

Devotee 2: There may be material things he doesn't know, but they're useless.

Prabhupāda: Eh?

Devotee 2: If there's some material information that such a person doesn't know, that's not really knowledge anyway.

Prabhupāda: I did not follow.

Devotee 2: If he doesn't know how many people live in...

Devotee 1: Just like Gaura-kīśora could not write. So it appeared that he did not, there was something that he did not know, although he knew Kṛṣṇa.

Prabhupāda: Yes. He knows everything. Otherwise how Bhaktisiddhānta accepted him as guru? He knows Kṛṣṇa. That's all.

Devotee 3: Whatever the spiritual master says, that is also perfect?

Prabhupāda: Yes. Because he says nothing concocted. Whatever he says, he says from śāstra, and guru. (Morning Walk 1975b.)

Prabhupāda here seems to make a distinction between spiritual knowledge (knowledge of Kṛṣṇa) and worldly knowledge. Bhurijāna at least makes this conclusion based on the same discussion: "Prabhupāda explains that the perfection and knowledge of an exalted devotee, a spiritual master, as being on a completely different level than scorpions, crabs, or spectacles eyesight ..." (1996, 123). However, these kinds of distinctions are in fact rare in the ISKCON literature, and like the excerpt shows, Prabhupāda himself had difficulty in understanding the point his disciples were trying to make. The theologically correct position implies something else. For example, in his *Bhagavad-gītā* purport for verse 7.2. Prabhupāda explains: "[w]hen the cause of all causes becomes known, then everything knowable becomes known, and nothing remains unknown" (Bg. 7.2 purport). Complete knowledge can thus be achieved through knowing Kṛṣṇa in accordance with disciplic succession. Discussing the same issue on another morning walk, Prabhupāda affirms that by their knowledge of Kṛṣṇa, the devotees become expert in everything else also:

Devotee 1: ...endeavor, pure devotees are automatically expert in politics, economics, everything.

Prabhupāda: Eh?

Devotee 1: Without separate endeavor, a pure devotee is automatically expert in everything.

Prabhupāda: Yes.

Devotee 1: Politics, economics.

Prabhupāda: Yes.

Devotee 1: Sociology.

Prabhupāda: *Yasmin vijñāte sarvam evaṁ vijñātaṁ bhavanti*. If you know Kṛṣṇa, then you understand everything. That is the Vedic injunction. *Yasmin vijñāte*. If you simply understand Kṛṣṇa... In Bhagavad-gītā, it is also said that “There will be no more anything to understand.” (Morning Walk 1975a)

In other words, all areas of knowledge become covered through knowledge of Kṛṣṇa. There are no “secular” fields of knowledge such as economics, political science or sociology that could be studied independently of the “science” of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The separation of secular and religious fields of knowledge is an alien conception for Prabhupāda. Thus, in a sense, through extensive knowledge of the Vedic scriptures, one is understood to become capable of knowing “everything” worth knowing. What is being implied by these discussions is that living beings are to be considered as somehow limited, however exalted they may be. Only God is to be considered an absolutely faultless, omniscient being. And yet the scope of expertise claimed by Prabhupāda and his followers is stunning by modern standards. The Vedic scriptures are thought to cover every possible field of knowledge, so that there is no need of studying anything else. In this sense, then, if the spiritual master knows the scriptures, he knows “everything”. He is the best advisor on any possible field of knowledge.

This is the theologically correct view on the matter. It is quite understandable that the devotees had difficulty in grasping it properly. Even more significant is that they tended to err in the opposite direction from the ordinary man on the street: they were predisposed to think that Prabhupāda was infallible and omniscient in his knowledge and were sometimes surprised to find out that this was not the case. Also worth noticing here is that Prabhupāda most certainly did not encourage his disciples’ misconceptions. He did not even try to create an impression that he had supernatural abilities in terms of knowledge. The disciples, apparently, acquired these ideas quite independently and spontaneously.

Questions regarding the nature of Prabhupāda’s knowledge were and are still not minor issues in the movement. In one notable case, reported by a number of devotees, a person leaves the movement as a result of disillusionment concerning Prabhupāda’s knowledge of physical universe. The issue concerns such an apparently trivial issue as the position of the moon with regard to the earth and sun. As was shown in the introduction, Prabhupāda was a staunch fundamentalist with regard to the Hindu sacred scriptures. He firmly believed that they are to be understood literally and that they are absolutely infallible. What is of considerable significance is that Prabhupāda considers *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to be in the same category of revealed scripture as other Vedic scriptures. Now, anyone familiar with the nature of Purāṇic cosmography can understand what a potentially explosive situation is thereby created. The *Purāṇas* contain graphic and detailed descriptions of the universe with Mount Meru in the centre, surrounded by distinct

circular continents separated by oceans of different liquids like salt water, sugar-cane juice, wine, clarified butter, curds, milk and sweet water. Also described are the sizes of these elements and the relative positions of the sun, moon and stars with regard to these. As it happens, the cosmography depicted in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* positions the moon further away from the earth than the sun, describes it as inhabited by demigods and, according to Prabhupāda's calculations, situates it much further from earth than modern astronomy lets us understand.

The salience of these kinds of preconceptions becomes evident when one adds to them the historical time frame of the 60's, when the Americans and the Russians were in a race to conquer outer space with enormous and world-wide media coverage. When the second moon landing of the American astronauts took place in November 1969, Prabhupāda was in England with his devotees. The press coverage inevitably reached Prabhupāda's ears, and he often talked about it, saying the whole moon operation was a hoax. He never did change this opinion. The official biography of Prabhupāda quotes him as saying:

The moon landing was a hoax, for they cannot go to the moon. The moon planet, Candraloka, is a residence of the demigods, higher beings than these drunkards and cow-eating slaughterers who are trying to inhabit it. You cannot think this travel is allowed [...] The moon planet cannot be visited so quickly. It is not possible. (Satsvarūpa 1993d, 58.)

Most of Prabhupāda's disciples accepted his statements. Prabhupāda accepted Vedic authority over modern science, so this was the standard for his disciples as well. But the biography reveals that one senior disciple did not accept this verdict, affecting his relationship with Prabhupāda. When the landing was shown on television, Prabhupāda asked to watch it with the devotees. When the television showed pictures of the men exploring the moon's surface, Prabhupāda asked the doubtful disciple of his what he could see. The disciple answered that all he could see on the moon's surface were rocks. Prabhupāda then questioned him further concerning people, trees, rivers and buildings, and when he confirmed that no such things were shown on television, he pronounced: "They have not landed on the moon. This is not the moon." (ibid., 70.)

The disciple left the movement a few weeks later. In his last discussion with Prabhupāda, he confessed that he had many questions about the movement and the moon, saying that he just did not believe all of it. When Prabhupāda asked him why if he had such questions, had he not asked him, the disciple answered that he had understood that such questions should only be asked of a person one can trust completely. The situation was thus clear from then onwards. He was no longer Prabhupāda's disciple and both understood it. (Ibid., 85.)

The moon issue clearly stuck in Prabhupāda's mind since he spoke about it relatively often (see, e.g. Hayagrīva 1985, 169; Hari Sauri 1994b, 92; 99-100; 110; 178-181; 196-202; 235; 241; 262-264; 499; 528; Tamal 1998, 98). What is of impor-



tance here is that such conflicts occurred in the first place. One can hardly imagine a more vivid example of a conflict of authority: religious beliefs seldom come into such a clear collision course with secular knowledge. In this case, it lead to a complete loss of faith of the disciple who chose to believe his own eyes and reason instead of Prabhupāda and the scriptural authority. This example shows how extensive the area covered by religious knowledge is in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. What this means in practice is that the potential areas in which conflicts are likely to occur are also very extensive.

## 8.2 Old age and sickness

Prabhupāda “departed from this world”, as the devotees express it, on November 14, 1977, in Vṛndāvana, India. Except for a brief stay in England, from late August through September 1977, he spent the last year of his life in India. During 1977 his health deteriorated increasingly. In February 1977, he was still taking short walks outside, although one time he stumbled and almost collapsed. On February 24, a serious illness began. He had a high fever, he couldn’t eat anything and his tissues became swollen with liquid. For a couple of days, Prabhupāda was constantly moaning in pain. Gradually, the fever went away as the medicines that were given to him started to have an effect. For a long time, he was so weak that he needed constant help from the devotees. However, by the end of March, Prabhupāda was again giving vigorous public lectures, despite still having no appetite. (Tamal 1998, 1-5.)

From then on, bouts of ill health alternated with periods when his condition seemed to improve. Constant problems included Prabhupāda’s body retaining liquids and a malfunctioning digestive system, often leaving him unable to eat. Prabhupāda distrusted Western medicines, although he occasionally took some. He was more often treated with Ayrvedic medicines by local *vaidyas* and *kavirājas*. He was adamant that he should not be taken to hospital or administered intravenous drugs even if he was unconscious (ibid., 17). Only once was he taken to hospital for an operation while he was staying in London in early September. Prabhupāda apparently could not pass urine, and after medical consultation the devotees realised that his condition was critical. The condition could have lead to a comatose state if proper medical care were delayed, and so the devotees called for an ambulance. (Ibid., 186-187.)

By September, Prabhupāda had lost control of his body and intestines, often soiling his bed (ibid., 189). Sometimes he had difficulty staying awake while hearing his correspondence (ibid., 198). His eyes and lungs were frequently filled with mucus, leading to prolonged coughing fits, his limbs were swollen and sleep disturbed. He could often drink only one glass of liquid a day. In addition to this, he would take a spoonful of *caraṇāmṛta* once every couple of hours. He was thus

under the constant care of his disciples, who bathed him, massaged him, took him to the bathroom and kept him clean. Others sang *kīrtana* for him. (Ibid., 187-222.)

Despite his poor physical condition, his mental faculties of reasoning and argumentation were as sharp as ever. He kept preaching to his disciples and gave them advice whenever he was well enough to speak. He was still working on his *Bhāgavatam* purports and translations in October, with the assistance of his devotees. He would also get involved in lengthy philosophical discussions with the devotees and visitors. (Ibid., 257-268.)

In the previous sections Prabhupāda's charisma has been shown to be largely dependent on his exceptionality. Despite his age, he was seen as youthful and vigorous, even boyish in his demeanour. Given this frame of perception, one would expect that visible signs of Prabhupāda's advancing age and deteriorating health would disturb these perceptions. To some extent, they did.

Prabhupāda's disease was always a somewhat delicate issue for his devotees. Satsvarūpa (1991, 223-229) tells of a letter he received from Prabhupāda already in 1968, which warned him not to worry about his spiritual master's "material body". The issue was raised because Satsvarūpa had inquired about Prabhupāda's health and hoped that he had been freed of some disease. Prabhupāda corrected him not to call the spiritual master "diseased" because disease is always material. Apparently, other devotees had received similar corrections. Satsvarūpa provides a theological commentary:

Actually, he had no material body, and his 'affliction' was either a transcendental symptom of ecstasy or a result of the sinful activities of his disciples — or it may have been a chance for his disciples to serve him. However, the disciples should not think their spiritual master's illness is his contamination. (1991, 228.)

Diseases are considered to be due to *karma*, and since the spiritual master is not to be considered conditioned by *karma*, his illness also cannot be ordinary. But if it is not ordinary, then the question arises of its true meaning. The devotees often seemed perplexed by this.

Satsvarūpa received another reply from Prabhupāda after sending him a report of a meeting in which the devotees had discussed the question of how *māyā* affects great devotees. The main question was: if the heroes of *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* were empowered by God, and some of them were actually incarnations of God, why did they have to suffer? In a letter (dated April 8, 1968) Prabhupāda states that "You may inform all devotees that Maya cannot touch a pure devotee. When you find a devotee supposedly in difficulty it is not the work of Maya, but it is the work of the Lord by His personal, internal potency." (Quoted in Satsvarūpa 1991, 238.) Thereafter, Prabhupāda explains that Kṛṣṇa's death by an arrow, Pandavas' tribulations and Christ's crucifixion, were personal acts of God. Even more importantly, Prabhupāda states that "[w]e cannot always

understand the intricacies of such incidences” (ibid., 239). However, what can be understood, and what is clearly stated in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, is that anyone who is completely engaged in the service of the Lord is outside the influence of *māyā*. This is something that the devotees should trust absolutely. The main conclusion therefore is that the devotees should believe in such things as “the plan of the Lord”, however mysterious it may seem (ibid., 242). Even though the tribulations may *appear* to be the actions of *māyā*, they should never be mistaken as such.

As a personal assistant to Prabhupāda during his last days, Tamal Krishna was in a position to witness all the “apparent” symptoms of disease. He saw how Prabhupāda gradually ceased chanting on his beads as his powers failed. He was taking personal care of Prabhupāda’s health and saw all the phases of his deteriorating physical condition. Yet he had the capacity to see Prabhupāda’s condition through the eyes of faith as he writes:

He can be seen with his eyes closed, always meditating on Kṛṣṇa with an intense, concentrated expression. Sometimes he stretches his neck, and sometimes he drools in his sleep and his body shakes. Sometimes there is loud belching. In this way, Śrīla Prabhupāda is exhibiting some of the ecstatic symptoms mentioned in *The Nectar of Devotion*. (Tamal 1998, 68.)

However, when Tamal Krishna voiced such an interpretation to Prabhupāda just as he was spitting some excess saliva into a spittoon, he was immediately corrected. The spitting was not to be considered a transcendental sign. Prabhupāda said such thinking was *sahajiyā*, i.e. heretical. (Ibid., 137.)

Not only was it difficult for devotees to understand how a pure devotee like Prabhupāda could get sick, since disease is considered “material”, the mere fact that Prabhupāda appeared helpless and was dependent on their constant assistance, was in itself slightly uncomfortable. At least it did evoke theological commentary. Tamal Krishna writes:

Śrīla Prabhupāda appears to always to need our assistance now. In actuality, it is an unusual mercy of our spiritual master to allow us to develop our love for him, and thus for Kṛṣṇa. When Prabhupāda wants to sit up now, he wraps his arms around our neck and allows us to pull him up. By such intimate contact, we are making so much advancement. [...]

Prabhupāda’s mind works so transcendently! No one can possibly understand how the ācārya thinks. (Tamal 1998, 179.)

What is noticeable here is the idiom of appearance versus reality. Prabhupāda is perceived as actually being in control of the situation, in spite of all evidence to the contrary. Prabhupāda is seen as completely self-sufficient, and yet, by his own will, appearing to be in need of care. “He acts as if he is dependent on my affection” (ibid., 185). He is seen as using the “appearance” of help-

lessness to elicit proper devotional conduct on the part of the devotees, who thus gain an opportunity to advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Again, we encounter in a particularly striking form the idea that Prabhupāda's actions are in reality a sort of play act, a drama or a sport (*līlā*) — backed up by the notion that ordinary persons cannot even dream of knowing what is actually going on behind the scenes. All of this is in accordance with the interpretation that it is a question of a secondary frame under threat of collapsing.

Satsvarūpa warns neophyte devotees not to become bewildered by their spiritual master being ill. He states (1979a, 47) that a neophyte devotee may have “various impure thoughts” and commit “great offences” in such a situation, and therefore presents the proper attitude:

And this should be our attitude in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Even if it gets difficult or we don't like something, still we have to stick to our service at the lotus feet of the spiritual master. It's do or die. And once you agree to do that, then there's no bewilderment: “Well, I don't know what's going on, actually. Maybe I'm fearful. Philosophically, maybe I don't understand. But all I know is that I am surrendered to my spiritual master. I'll just do whatever he says. And I will never give up serving him until there's absolutely no life left in my body. (Satsvarūpa 1979a, 47.)

Again, as in the previous quotation, the emphasis lies fundamentally on the attitude of ignorance on the part of the disciple. In other words, the unknowability of the guru's identity is in the final analysis the ultimate protective device for the religious frame of perception. We have repeatedly seen how all the disconfirming evidence of the guru's extraordinariness is glossed over by a notion of mystery, the inability of ordinary mortals to apprehend the situation in the proper way.

### 8.3 Death of the guru

In the beginning of October 1977, a significant exchange took place between Prabhupāda and his senior disciples. Prabhupāda was feeling very ill and complaining about mucus. When the disciples tried to persuade Prabhupāda to drink some more liquid, he suddenly urged his disciples to decide upon his life or death, saying that he didn't want to recover. He said he wanted to die peacefully in Vṛndāvana. To recover he naturally needed to take something, but living seemed to bring so many complications. The devotees were stunned. They were in a dilemma. As Tamal Krishna put it: “The devotees could not speak, because they felt if they asked Prabhupāda to stay after he had decided to leave, it would be an offence. They did not want to say ‘stay and struggle’, but no one of us wanted him

to leave either.” (Tamal 1998, 238.) Prabhupāda further explained that Kṛṣṇa had given him complete freedom, he could do as he liked, either stay or go.

The disciples discussed the situation and concluded that since Prabhupāda had said Kṛṣṇa had given him freedom to do as he liked and since he had asked their opinion, it was really their choice. One of the devotees also brought up the question of why they should think the situation was hopeless. He reasoned that “mundane yogis” could bring people back from the dead, and Jesus is said to have done that, so certainly Prabhupāda was capable of it, if he so wished. The reasoning seemed to have an effect and the disciples’ mood changed. They decided to request Prabhupāda to stay with them. Upon hearing their request, Prabhupāda pondered for awhile, keeping the devotees in suspense. Then, suddenly, he yawned. With his mouth stretched open, he said “alright” as if it was the most casual decision. Again, the devotees were stunned and amazed at how wonderfully outrageous Prabhupāda’s actions were. To the devotees, Prabhupāda once again proved himself completely beyond everyone’s understanding. Finally, they broke into laughter, and Prabhupāda asked for something to drink. (Ibid., 237-241.)

As things turned out, Prabhupāda did not keep his promise and died only a few weeks later. On November 12, Prabhupāda complained of sharp pains in his body. These recurred at three-hour intervals until the evening of the 14, when Prabhupāda finally passed away in 7:25 p.m. in the presence of his devotees. (Ibid., 350-352.)

The death of the spiritual master left the disciples somewhat perplexed. On the one hand, they were certain that Prabhupāda was a pure devotee, and thus, went directly to Kṛṣṇa’s abode, to serve him eternally. And this, of course, is a matter for rejoicing. He had accomplished what every one of them was trying to achieve, salvation. As Satsvarūpa put it: “It’s not ordinary; there is nothing to lament for him” (1979a, 45). Immediately after Prabhupāda’s departure, there indeed was not much crying in Vṛndāvana. The sentiment is reported to have been one of cool-headedness, inspired by the idea that “Prabhupāda is still with us”. (Ibid., 48.) And yet, there is also an instruction, backed up by Prabhupāda and by scripture, that when the spiritual master leaves, the disciples should cry (ibid.).

In his lectures on the issue, Satsvarūpa dwells very perceptively on these apparently contradictory messages. He states very emphatically that both sides should be there. On the one hand, the disciple’s duty is to cry when the spiritual master expires. On the other hand, he should also know that the spiritual master always keeps company with the disciple in the form of his instructions, as long as the disciple follows these instructions. This is called association of *vāñī* of spiritual master, while physical presence is called *vapuḥ*. (Ibid., 48-49.)

The instruction to cry is harder to explain and seems to be in need of emphasis that “this is not a mundane sentiment” (ibid.). The logic behind the instruction is apparently that the devotees should cry on behalf of the world. “What will the world do without his guidance?” (Ibid., 46.) The situation is not a tragedy

for the spiritual master, nor for the disciples, but for the world, which now is again on the brink of succumbing to evil influences. So the devotees should cry out of compassion for the people of the world who are in greater danger of getting lost without the guidance of the illustrious guru.

The above, then, are the theologically correct attitudes with regard to the passing away of a spiritual master. However, just behind the surface, the already familiar vulnerability of frames can be detected here also. There are right attitudes and wrong attitudes about Prabhupāda leaving this world. Satsvarūpa writes that the disappearance of the spiritual master should not be misunderstood:

And improper action would be to have doubts: “Oh, the *guru* has left. Why did he leave? I don’t understand why he left.” Or “I heard he was experiencing some pain. Why didn’t he do this or that? Why didn’t this other thing happen?” (Ibid., 29.)

One can almost hear these questions completed: “Why didn’t he stay as he decided? Why didn’t he resurrect from the dead?” That these questions are not so far off the mark is indicated by Tamal Krishna’s description of the moments just after Prabhupāda had passed his final breath. Lead by various devotees, the disciples had performed *kīrtana* for the entire day. “Prabhupāda’s expression was sublime, just as he had previously sat on the *vyāsāsana*. His eyes were closed, there was a smile on his face, and we all expected and prayed that any moment he would lift his hand and return to us.” (Tamal 1998, 353.) Up to the last moment, the devotees expected some previously unprecedented event to take place. When nothing truly extraordinary took place, some may have entertained doubts. Was he divine after all? However, as Satsvarupa emphasises, that would be a mistake:

The faithless person thinks, “he always preached liberation of the soul, but now I see that he is also a conditioned soul.” No. He is spiritual every step of the way. And if he leaves this material body, that also is — try to understand this — just another manifestation of his divinity as a pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa, teaching us how to leave the body. (1979a, 78.)

In another example, Satsvarūpa tells of how Prabhupāda was so weak that as he translated the *Bhāgavatam* purports a disciple held the dictaphone in front of Prabhupāda’s mouth as he lay flat on the bed, barely able to speak. Yet it would be a grave mistake to think that Prabhupāda was therefore shown to be defeated by material nature (ibid., 78). The proper attitude, again, is founded upon unknowing:

We may not understand all the esoteric aspects of feelings of separation, but we have to understand the importance of cooperating (ibid., 29).

When he left, that was also a blessing. Exactly how it is a blessing we don't fully understand. But we should. [...] This is what we are trying to understand; we are trying to take hold of this opportunity. It's a blessing for developing your inner life and your attachment to Srila Prabhupada, which you may not have cultivated very carefully until now. (ibid., 30-31.)

The problem is, of course, that the whole movement is based on the idea that to be able to serve and associate with the spiritual master is the highest blessing and benediction there is. The spiritual master is the single most potent route to salvation. So how could separation from the spiritual master be beneficial? Yet, in a paradoxical manner, it is taught that serving in separation has a very special sweetness about it, and that the spiritual master's leaving of the material world is also, however mysteriously, a blessing in disguise.

## 8.4 Conclusion

In this section, I have reviewed evidence concerning situations that might be interpreted as counter-evidence to Prabhupāda's charismatic qualities. In the previous sections, disciples were shown to spontaneously interpret some of Prabhupāda's actions as involving counterintuitive psychology, counterintuitive physics and essentialistic notions of "spiritual glow". Thus, we saw that Prabhupāda was believed capable of perceiving and influencing events in mysterious ways while simultaneously being physically present in a distant location. He was also believed to emit an almost visible substance to his surroundings and the objects and persons he touched or even glanced at. Furthermore, Prabhupāda was seen as capable of a level of control in interpersonal situations that was highly unusual. All these representations combine to suggest that he had godlike powers of influence on the physical universe, godlike knowledge of the world and godlike selflessness and benevolence towards the world.

Here, however, we have seen that Prabhupāda did not know the difference between a crab and a scorpion, and denied such knowledge being needed in order to be a pure devotee of the Lord. He also apparently did not know various things of which he inquired about from his disciples. His relationship with his disciples was not supposed to be based on mind-reading. The disciples were exhorted to reveal their minds to him honestly and sincerely. He also made some predictions that apparently failed. A "faithless" conclusion may therefore be reached that Prabhupāda's mind and capacities of knowledge were quite ordinary after all. Thus, Prabhupāda's lack of knowledge points to the vulnerability of the religious frame.

It was further shown how the devotees saw Prabhupāda's body deteriorating to the point of making him completely helpless and in need of constant assis-

tance. The devotees also saw various forms of illness taking hold of their spiritual master. Finally, despite promises of control over death itself, Prabhupāda died, for many devotees at least, prematurely. Old age, sickness and death, the primary signs of material existence, were predictably challenging events for the devotees to properly understand. However, the religious frame apparently held firm against these challenges. Yet, from the discussion, it is evident how labile and attention-demanding the situation sometimes was.

One of the most striking themes arising from this analysis is the attitude of unknowingness and not understanding that was always required of the devotees. Whatever the challenge, in the final analysis, the commentators turned to the language of mystery — how impossible it is for anyone to truly understand what really is happening. The message was invariably the same: things are not as they seem. Prabhupāda is only “apparently” ignorant, only “apparently” old and diseased, his death was only “apparently” ordinary. Behind all these seemingly ordinary situations and perceptions, the assumption was that a bigger picture, a secret hand, a transcendental purpose existed which was only dimly revealed to the devotees.

The more strongly the “faithless” conclusion of the events suggested itself, the more the devotees were forced to labour to root out improper attitudes and doubts. The seeming ordinariness of their spiritual master appeared to evoke the greatest amount of theological reflection, perplexity and confusion. Thus, there is reason to believe that what is generally recognised as “religious” by popular language, that is to say, the exegetical commentaries and the adjoining ritual actions, has much to do with protection of certain ideas and denial of contradictory data and thoughts. In other words, the religious frame works as a sort of protective device for certain vital information.



## PART III

# INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS



## SECTION NINE

# Cognitive explanations

In recent years, a number of theories have emerged that attempt to account for the special nature of the representations found in religious symbolism from the viewpoint of cognitive theory (see e.g. Lawson and McCauley 1990; Guthrie 1993; Boyer 1994; 2001; Whitehouse 1995; 2000; Pyysiäinen 2001b). These theories have added fresh insights to our understanding of how people represent supernatural concepts, how they acquire these concepts and how they respond to these concepts through religious action such as ritual (Barrett 2000). Some elements of these theories have already been introduced in section 3, where for instance the nature of supernatural concepts was explored through Boyer's catalogue of counterintuitive representations. However, in that context, these theoretical concepts were introduced only for their heuristic value. The larger body of theory which encompasses these concepts was not covered.

Except for Whitehouse's theory, most of these theories have been developed on a more or less deductive basis with their starting points in present-day findings of cognitive psychology. These theories arise from experiments in the laboratory and have been applied to explain a variety of ethnographic observations. In this study, I have proceeded in a very different fashion. I have attempted to give a comprehensive description of a single case of the Hare Kṛṣṇa culture in such a way that the findings would have bearing on the cognitive theories.

In what follows, I shall discuss the findings of the present study in light of some of the relevant theoretical arguments presented by other researchers within the field of the cognitive science of religion.

### 9.1 The role of cultural models

As was shown in section 5, the powerful organising principles of status hierarchy and ritual purity pervade the ritual activities and extend to the devotees' understandings of the guru concept. These principles were hardly the ones held by the hippie community, from which the earliest disciples were drawn. Radical equali-

tarianism, a general appearance of untidiness and free use of drugs and intoxicants were the order of the day in the hippie community. Status hierarchy and ritual purity are notions that challenged and overturned all of the former values.

The particular way in which the Hindu culture combines notions of purity and status hierarchy may be unique to that culture. Thus far, I have treated these representations in terms of Hindu cultural models, which is in accordance with the general practice within the anthropology of Indian society and religion. Certainly these are powerful cultural models, which seem to exert little influence in Western societies as compared with Indian.

However, specific components of this cultural model, such as notions of purity, pollution and status, can also be found universally (see Brown 1991, 137; 139). Thus, it can be argued that the success and long-term survival of these ideas in the Indian subcontinent is rooted in these cultural models being pan-human mental dispositions. Indian culture may simply have emphasised these items more than other cultures. This, however, does not mean that these ideas are entirely absent from other cultures.

It can be argued that the features that made Prabhupāda attractive were precisely those encompassed within the ideas of purity and hierarchy. To quote Ravindra Svarūpa:

ISKCON aims at creating “pure devotees” of God, that is to say, people who serve God without any personal motive and without any interruption and who are free from all material desires. [...] Much of the power with which ISKCON is able to present this ideal as both a desirable and an achievable aim depends upon the concrete, physical presence of a successful devotee who functions as an exemplary model, a paradigmatic individual. (1994b, 44.)

In other words, much of Prabhupāda’s charisma was based upon the devotees’ perception of him in terms of purity. He indicated to his disciples that he never broke the four regulative principles despite spending most of his life not as an ascetic but rather as a business entrepreneur and a householder with a wife and four children. According to all available evidence, he does appear to have maintained very high standards of personal habits and morality throughout his world-wide mission. This was no doubt a major cause of the attraction and admiration expressed by people he met, even though as an explicit concept, the idea of status hierarchy based on ritual purity was in all likelihood alien to them.

What this means is that Prabhupāda’s person was a sort of *revelation* for Westerners, who hardly believed that such a morally elevated life-style was possible for human beings. Prabhupāda told them what nobody had said before: that it was possible for them to lead a life-style they had thought only conceivable in religious mythology. In other words, the reason for the attractiveness of the notions of status hierarchy and ritual purity lies not in cultural preparedness for

known concepts but in the attention-grabbing nature of strikingly alien concepts. Everything Prabhupāda said or did tended to violate the devotees' tacit expectations concerning interpersonal dealings because he always acted according to these principles.

## 9.2 Frame violations and religious symbolism

Section 6 presented a whole range of devotees' perceptions of Prabhupāda, which provides supporting evidence that violated expectations were the key to charismatic perceptions. Most of the examples were taken from descriptions of first encounters with Prabhupāda. As I tried to show, the material contains a unified theme that can be described in terms of the Goffmanian notion of 'primary frame violation'. As was explained in section 3, Goffman distinguishes two primary frameworks according to which humans everywhere organise their experiences: the natural frame and the social frame. This principle of human cognition, in turn, helps us to explain the universal fascination that certain phenomena exert on human imagination, namely, situations in which there is a perceived violation of the unconsciously held expectation that the primary frameworks entail. The evidence shows that the events that Prabhupāda's disciples perceived as especially striking, memorable and worth retelling were precisely the kinds of situations that violate some deeply held expectations. The devotees admired Prabhupāda's ability to maintain control of his audiences in situations that were sometimes highly volatile. This would be an example of the Goffmanian category of 'stunts', or the surprising ability to maintain control in adverse situations.

Representations are also present that could easily be categorised in terms of Goffman's 'tension of frames'. This is a category that includes various types of conflicting frames impinging upon each other. The recurrent theme of Prabhupāda's "boyishness" or "childlikeness" indicates conflicting perceptions of his biological and social age categories. Biologically, he was of course an elderly person, yet his demeanour sometimes evidenced unmistakable adolescent features, which puzzled the disciples. Most of the "exotic" items of personal habit and dress could also be categorised under tension of frames.

One might ask, why frame violations have figured so strongly in the materials. Dan Sperber's theory of symbolism provides a useful starting point for reflecting on the possible explanations for this phenomenon. Sperber's *Rethinking Symbolism* (1975) was a groundbreaking work within the field of cognitive studies of religion in that it was the first theoretical attempt to go beyond the semiological paradigm in the study of symbolism. The semiological view of symbolism is that behind the apparently irrational symbolic activity lies a hidden code, which one needs to break to understand the true meanings of symbolic and ritual proceedings. In other words, symbolic activity in reality is about something other than what is immediately apparent. Different theories have postulated either

sexuality or sociality as the ultimate referents for the obscure ritual symbolism found in religions.

Sperber challenged the semiological views strongly. He argued that symbolic interpretation is not a matter of decoding but an *improvisation* that rests on implicit knowledge and obeys unconscious rules (1975, xi). In Sperber's alternative model, there is an autonomous mechanism in the human mind that alongside the perceptual and conceptual mechanisms participates in the construction of knowledge and functioning of memory. This 'symbolic mechanism' is part of the innate mental equipment of human beings and is not derived from experience of either the natural or the social world.

According to Sperber's model, the symbolic mechanism takes over when the conceptual mechanism fails to make new information assimilable to memory. The symbolic mechanism tries to establish by its own means the relevance of the defective conceptual representation (1975, 112-113).

When new information is presented to the conceptual mechanism, two conditions must be fulfilled for the process of validation to be effective. Firstly, the new information must be described by entirely analysed statements. Secondly, the previous knowledge that this new information may enrich or modify must be found in encyclopaedic memory. If either the description of new information or its linking to the encyclopaedic knowledge fails, the conceptual mechanism is unable to make the new information relevant and the symbolic mechanism is activated. In other words, a representation is symbolic to the extent that it is not expressible by ordinary semantic means. (Ibid.)

The symbolic mechanism has two aspects: 1) focalisation, or the displacement of attention, and 2) evocation, or a search in passive memory. Focalisation means that the attention moves from the unassimilable statements to their unfulfilled conceptual conditions. Evocation means that the passive memory is reviewed and tested to find any information that could satisfy the unfulfilled conditions. The symbolic mechanism provides a second mode of access to memory, working in parallel with the normal cognitive processes. (1975, 120-122.)

Translated into the terms of Sperber's hypothesis, we may presume that what took place in Prabhupāda's interactions with his disciples was that some actions and elements of his person initially failed to make sense to his audiences. His actions and utterances created situations that were difficult for Westerners to process in the context of old information. Thus, their ordinary conceptual mechanisms sometimes aborted. Once the conceptual mechanisms failed, the symbolic mechanism was then activated to search for whatever information from the passive memory would make the activities and situations relevant. The whole process thus depends on the search for meaningfulness and relevance in certain kinds of arousing situations. The result was that Prabhupāda became for his adherents a highly symbolic being, sometimes capable of evoking powerful intuitions of mysteriousness, i.e., being unknowable in principle.

How human memory works is still a matter for debate; the important issue here is that religious symbolism in general seems to be activated in situations of uncertainty or ambiguity. However, Whitehouse (2000, 117-124) has argued that the activation of symbolic imagery in addition to surprise also depends on evocation of emotion. In imagistic rites, the participant's normal expectations are violated so that they cannot be assimilated into existing schemas. But the rites also have a profound emotional value. As a result, these rites are remembered as unique and vivid episodes that can be used to derive symbolic associations over a long period. Whitehouse's criticism of Sperber extends to the process of transmission of religious concepts (1996). I shall take up this issue in subsection 9.5.

Sperber's theory is also very general and does not describe typical results of such a symbolic process. In Sperber's view, much of the symbolism is individual, as it depends on the specific contents of each person's passive memories. According to this model, symbolic interpretations should show enormous variation from individual to individual because they are based more or less on improvisation. However, this is not what is actually the case. Religious symbolism the world over clearly shows delimited topics and recurring patterns. Similarly, in the materials analysed here, certain characteristic themes emerge into which the resultant religious representations can be grouped.

### **9.3 Representations of special agency**

As the evidence shows, there are some obvious counterintuitive elements in the representations of Prabhupāda's person. Counterintuitiveness means that the early intuitive and largely unconscious inferential principles are violated in certain types of representations. Two main categories of such violations were often held of Prabhupāda's person. Foremost is the ubiquitous idea that ordinary persons cannot know Prabhupāda's mind and its converse side that Prabhupāda is able to know everything that goes on in the disciple's mind. Such representations violate our ordinary intuitions about the accessibility of other people's mental contents.

Human beings have highly sophisticated mental mechanisms for social interaction. Boyer calls the information that is geared towards regulating social interaction 'strategic information' (2000, 205). Humans depend on finely tuned co-operation with each other. This co-operation creates all sorts of strategic problems, for which highly complex capacities exist — such as the ability to gain information about other people's mental states, i.e., what is known as 'social intelligence'. Nevertheless, it is fundamental to our intuitive theory of mind that access to such information is imperfect. However, as Boyer (2000, 207) notes, religious agents are frequently credited with the capacity of having unlimited access to strategic information in any situation. A limiting case of such agents is, of course,

gods who know everything. As we saw in section 8, the issue of the limits of Prabhupāda's knowledge was a serious preoccupation for the devotees.

The second important category of counterintuitive representations consists of those representations that ascribe counterintuitive physics to Prabhupāda's person. In more general terms, this means that Prabhupāda was supposed to be mysteriously capable of influencing the devotees' lives from a distance. To disciples, it frequently seemed that the events of their lives were secretly being choreographed by Prabhupāda. These representations indicate the very special nature of agency attributed to Prabhupāda.

In day-to-day situations, Prabhupāda was often (not always, of course) represented as an omniscient, omnipresent, all-powerful, absolutely benevolent being with no human weaknesses. When the devotees met with unusual situations, strikingly lucky or unlucky turns of events or improbable observations, these almost always triggered some form of speculation about Prabhupāda's ability to orchestrate and control such events "behind the curtains". In other words, the disciples invariably acted with the consciousness that whatever challenges and blessings they encountered were due to the "mercy of the guru".

Boyer's catalogue of the supernatural contains a strong hypothesis concerning typical ways religious representations are constructed. Boyer's model of explanation is not geared towards explaining how the representations originate, but what sort of constraints apply selective pressure on them. According to Boyer's (1994) argument, this restricted catalogue is a result of selective processes operating on the much more varied set of representations constantly being produced by human minds. In other words, his theory postulates that some specific features are present in the characteristic religious representations that make them more easily transmitted and acquired than other forms of representation. Counterintuitive representations have clear advantages over other forms of representation, which explains why they are so often found in widely differing cultural milieu. The particular combination of one violation with otherwise preserved expectations is probably a sort of 'cognitive optimum'. The combination is attention-grabbing because it contains a striking violation of intuitive expectations, but it also allows for rich inferences to be made on the basis of the preserved expectations. Combinations of different violations tend to disrupt the inferential potential, and therefore, such concepts are usually short-lived (Boyer 2001, 86).

Typical representations of the guru naturally fall within Boyer's catalogue. As I have argued, the guru is frequently represented as a person with counterintuitive psychology and/or counterintuitive physics. What is interesting in these findings is that a combination of two violations often occur. A case in point is when devotees think that the guru can read their mind from the other side of the world. This contradicts Boyer's hypothesis. If Boyer is correct, such representations should prove to be short-lived exceptions. Representations that do not involve such combinations of counterintuitiveness have a selective advantage over



the long run. It seems, however, that Indian lore regarding gurus abounds in such notions, which provides some room for scepticism regarding Boyer's claims.

#### **9.4 Essentialism**

As we saw in section 7, representations of Prabhupāda's person also abounded in curious notions concerning his presence and contact. Devotees frequently described him in terms of the 'effulgence' he was capable of emitting to his surroundings. Whatever Prabhupāda touched or used was thereafter venerated as a sacred object. The devotees were always overjoyed if Prabhupāda touched or used some of their belongings or gave something to them as a gift. Prabhupāda seemed to carry within himself some elusive yet highly contagious and precious substance.

This idea of a hidden mysterious dimension that is capable of workings that transcend our ordinary perceptual and intellectual capacities can be neatly captured by the concept of 'essentialism'. As elaborated by Gelman and Hirschfeld (1999), the attribution of an underlying, hidden essence to various objects of experience is a frequent strategy of thinking that can be found the world over. As shown in section 3, essentialistic representations are typified by the following properties: invisibility, difficulty of removal, transferability without diminishment, unknown causal implications and implications on identity. The disciples' behaviour and attitude towards Prabhupāda and the objects and food he had had contact with indicate that they are based on essentialistic representations.

More importantly in the present context, Gelman and Hirschfeld give a detailed account of the conditions that are likely to trigger essentialistic reasoning. They cite two conditions for this: 1) when the entities of a domain undergo regular and radical transformation that is otherwise inexplicable; 2) when encountering an event that is unpredicted or causally anomalous with respect to other events in the same domain (*ibid.*, 434).

This idea that anomalous events and objects with regard to everyday reasoning may lead to a recruitment of essentialist schemas for understanding supports the general account of Prabhupāda's charisma advanced here. The primary frame violations result not only in the search for special conceptions of agency but also in essentialistic understandings.

#### **9.5 Charisma and the sacred**

As we have already seen, things difficult to represent easily evoke deeper templates for processing, such as agent causality or essentialism. Humans have a limited capacity to represent large-scale interactive aggregates of phenomena, such as social or ecological processes, to themselves. Long-term social processes and

large-scale natural environmental processes are notoriously hard to perceive and to conceptualise. As we saw in section 5, the entire ISKCON organisation was often likened to Prabhupāda's body. Cash flows were seen as Prabhupāda's bloodstream, the printing press as his heart, etc. The whole universe, furthermore, is conceived as Kṛṣṇa's handiwork. The significant social and political processes and turns of events are easily envisaged in terms of the works of Kṛṣṇa or, more often, the opposing force of demons.

But religion does not simply consist of special kinds of representations. As Pyysiäinen (2001b, 218) has observed, it is the unquestioning belief that distinguishes religious representations from other forms of counterintuitive representations. Religion involves a conception that the special beliefs are somehow of the *greatest possible significance and value*. Such beliefs are not easily discarded. Many kinds of religious practices can be explained at least in part as attempts to protect and maintain things and ideas considered to be infinitely valuable. The point I am trying to make is that the perceptions of value which are linked with special agency and essentialistic images denote to the concept of the 'sacred' as it has been articulated within the field of comparative religion (cf. Anttonen 1993; 1996; 1999; Paden 1999).

In this context sacredness can most profitably be approached as a form of secondary frame in the Goffmanian scheme. The point here is that things, events, places, time periods, persons etc. are perceived as sacred because they are framed as such. The characteristic feature of secondary framing is that it has to be maintained against violations. Secondary frames are vulnerable. This vulnerability in turn explains the fact that sacred places, objects and beliefs are protected by so many rules and prohibitions. As we saw in chapter four, there are more than forty rules of prohibition regarding the devotional activities and mantra chanting in the movement.

Similarly, as we saw in the chapter eight, there spontaneously emerged certain prohibitions with regard to how Prabhupāda's actions and states of health could be interpreted. The senior devotees frequently warned their audiences of falling into wrong ways of interpreting Prabhupāda's illness or death. What was to be protected was the image of Prabhupāda as an extraordinary person. What was to be avoided at all costs were certain interpretations, which would have indicated that Prabhupāda was an "ordinary person". These prohibitions indicate that the perception of Prabhupāda's extraordinariness was very labile during the critical last months of his life. The situation needed some active measures to uphold the frame of sacrality around Prabhupāda. These measures, in turn consisted of what is known as *noncommunication*, to use a term coined by Gregory Bateson (Bateson and Bateson 1988; see also Vesala and Knuuttila 2001; Vesala et al., in press).

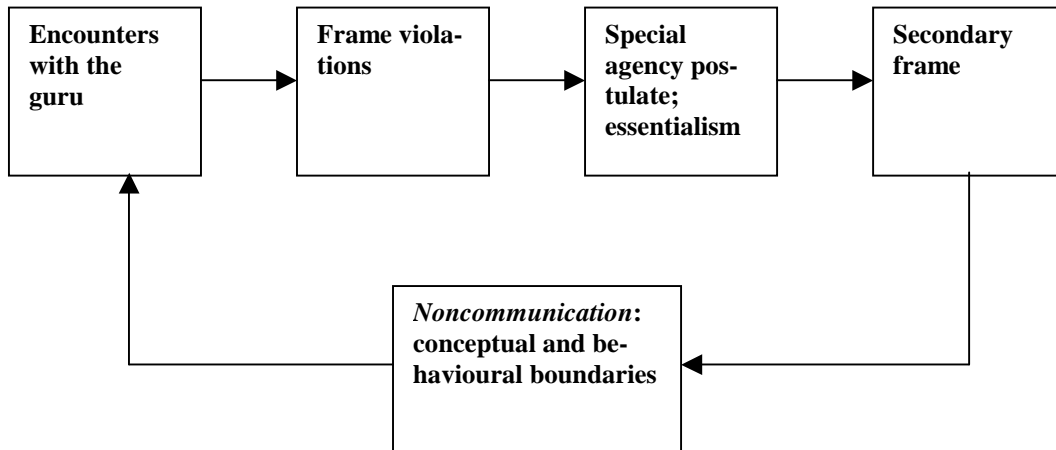
Bateson looked at communication from the systems theoretical point of view. He soon recognized that for systems to operate properly, the distribution of information within the system has to be limited in certain important ways. One of

these was that information of higher logical type should not be mixed with information of lower logical type (Bateson 1970). In other words, noncommunication is thus a protective mechanism for the information processing system (Vesala et al., in press).

What Bateson also saw was that this principle was also in evidence in human intrapsychic and interpersonal communication. His unique hypothesis was that certain phenomena, like humour, aesthetic appreciation, and religion could be explained in terms of noncommunication. The rules protecting sacred things pointed towards the need in the social system to protect certain propositions from being inappropriately used and thus falsified. Noncommunication is thus a deeply systemic phenomenon, which points towards the need to describe the culture from a systemic point of view.

Here it has not been possible to give a holistic account of the Hare Kṛṣṇa culture. The analysis has focused on a much more limited aspect, Prabhupāda's charisma. However, from the evidence we can already see that Prabhupāda was a sacred person, capable of transforming impure things into pure ones, things of low value into precious objects of veneration. For the devotees he was at the boundary of the human and the superhuman dimensions of existence. This sacredness was maintained not only by the elaborate ritual rules of deference and worship, but also by conceptual boundaries that prohibited certain interpretations from arising.

Fig. 3 *Process of Prabhupāda's charisma*



The sacredness thus points to the fact that the various elements of religious symbolism and special activities around the person of Prabhupāda are in complex interrelationship with each other. Prabhupāda was usually initially met in a ritual encounters of one form or another; these encounters sometimes produced striking frame violations in the minds of the onlookers; these frame violations in turn trigger various interpretations of special, partly unknowable agency, which was

characterized by extraordinary purity and capacity of mysterious influence on the lives of the devotees; this supernaturalist interpretation in turn prompted efforts to rule out contrary evidence of Prabhupāda's ordinariness; these forms of non-communication, behavioural and conceptual prohibitions in turn constitute the ritual frame of proper interaction with the guru — thus closing the circle (see Fig. 3).

## 9.6 Communication of charisma

In light of these findings, what can be said of the overall process of transmission of religious conceptions? The rapid spread of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement hints at the possibility that something in the process of transmission has contributed to the overall success of the movement.

Sperber (1996, 58) proposes that the explanation for culture is necessarily embedded in what he terms 'epidemiology of representations'. Some representations are slowly transmitted over generations (traditions) and are comparable to endemics, whereas some are spread rapidly through large populations but have limited life spans (fashions) and are comparable to epidemics. The analogy is not a complete one, however. While the transmission of infectious diseases is characterised by replication of viruses or bacteria, in cultural transmission, one more often meets transformations and mutations than faithful reproduction.

Sperber (*ibid.*, 69) has also suggested that there are different types of representations, which are distributed through different mechanisms. Concepts exist that owe their origin to innate mental schemas. As we saw in section 3, strong psychological evidence is available for humans having an innate disposition to develop different schemas for different domains of experience. Concepts of 'living kinds', 'artefacts', 'colour' and the like tend to conform to these schemas known as *basic concepts*. However, a vast array of more elaborate concepts for which there is no such readiness of acquisition also exists. Most religious and scientific concepts require a great deal of time, energy and formal teaching to internalise.

Everyday empirical knowledge, which is formulated in terms of basic concepts, is developed under firm logical and perceptual constraints. But the more elaborate types of knowledge involve other cognitive abilities. One of these is meta-representational ability. This allows humans to form representations of representations and 'reflective beliefs' (beliefs which are believed by virtue of second-order beliefs about them). A noteworthy consequence of this ability is that we may possess and represent beliefs which are only half-understood. Even if we do not know what it means to say  $E = MC^2$ , we may still hold beliefs about this belief.

In Sperber's opinion, religious beliefs consist to a large degree not only of half-understood ideas but of full-fledged conceptual mysteries, for which no

amount of training will ever be sufficient to clarify them (*ibid.*, 72). He speculates that the possible reason for their success in cultural terms is that as mysteries they are more evocative, and thus, more memorable. As put by Sperber: “The most evocative representations are those which, on the one hand, are closely related to the subject’s other mental representations, and, on the other hand, can never be given a final interpretation. It is these relevant mysteries, as they could be described, which are culturally successful.” (*Ibid.*, 73.)

Some experimental evidence already exists for such a hypothesis (Barrett 2000, 30; Boyer 2001, 78-84; Boyer and Ramble, *in press*). Psychologists Justin L. Barrett and Melanie A. Nyhof (2001) tested the transmission advantage of counterintuitive concepts in four experiments involving one hundred college students in America. Their results showed clear support for the hypothesis that, all else being equal, concepts that have a property which violates intuitive assumptions of its category membership were better remembered and transmitted than other concepts.

However, again we must note that this hypothesis concerns a very limited formal property of representations and its effect on recall and thus transmissibility. In practice, when we are looking at particular cases, all else is seldom equal. There are compelling reasons to suppose that ecological factors play a large part in the process of acquisition of religious concepts. The beliefs do not float around in a neutral environment. Humans co-operate to create environments where there are better chances of survival for particular representations. Mental representations are turned into public ones. This is also acknowledged by Sperber: “[e]cological factors include the recurrence of situations in which the representation gives rise to, or contributes to, appropriate action, the availability of external memory stores (writing in particular), and the existence of institutions engaged in the transmission of the representation” (1996, 84). To understand the dissemination of Hindu concepts in the Western cultural milieu, it is therefore necessary to take an especially close look at the operation of the institutions (new religious movements such as ISKCON) in terms of the recurrent forms of action and interaction made possible by the institutions. There are strong feedback loops between psychological and ecological factors constituted by collective action.

As pointed out by Whitehouse (1996), there is a second factor which needs to be taken into account and is lacking in the epidemiological perspective: the presence of emotions in religious contexts of transmission. Pyysiäinen has also recently argued that Sperber’s account of the transmission of religious belief “is one-sided and needs to be complemented by taking into consideration religious belief and emotions” (2001a, 70). Conscious experience and the emotional aspect of religion are vitally important when dealing with the question of transmission of religious concepts.

The foremost instance of collective action supporting the spread of particular representations, and simultaneously, eliciting emotional reactions is, of course, ritual. Numerous anthropological theories of ritual have a built-in assumption

that religious beliefs are affirmed and supported by emotions generated by collective ritual actions. Yet few of them present any psychological mechanisms which could explain this effect (Pyysiäinen 2001b, 77). Whitehouse's theory of the divergent modes of religiosity does involve considerations of emotion for the transmission of religion, but it is only the more intense, ecstatic and terrorising experiences of imagistic rites that play a significant role in his schema. What about more ordinary, low-key effects on mood that can be expected to arise in a doctrinal mode of religiosity such as ISKCON? Are they to be considered unimportant or inconsequential?

Anthropologist Roy A. Rappaport (1979; 1999) has developed a comprehensive theory of ritual<sup>14</sup> which articulates unusually clearly the idea of mutual strengthening of religious conceptual representations and physiological stimulation. As I have already emphasised, characteristic religious beliefs are generally invested with mysteriousness (principle of unknowability). They are often counterintuitive, violating certain intuitive expectations derived from basic ontological categories. Rappaport calls such typical religious beliefs *ultimate sacred postulates*. To postulate is to claim without demonstration — generally because of supposed self-evidence or obviousness (1999, 278). It is a characteristic feature of religious discourse that the most sacred items of belief are held to be so self-evident that for the believer it seems sheer madness to deny them. It is Rappaport's most significant insight into the nature of religious discourse to highlight and give a plausible account of this feature. The term 'ultimate' refers to sacred postulates being the most authoritative statements within religious discourse. They cannot be explained by anything logically or causally prior; conversely, other, lower-order statements are given legitimacy by invoking them. (Ibid., 313-343.)

The most important characteristic of sacred postulates is that they are devoid of material referents, from which it follows that they tend to be unfalsifiable by any event or state of the world. They are nevertheless generally held among the participants to be unquestionable, immutable and ultimately authoritative (ibid., 268-269). From the perspective of an outsider, it often seems that these are the strangest and most unlikely beliefs to be true. How does this peculiar incongruence come about?

Rappaport uses the term 'numinous' — originally coined by Rudolf Otto (1969 [1917]) — to refer to the non-discursive, or emotional and experiential side of religion.<sup>15</sup> Sacred postulates are discursive and their referents are not material;

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<sup>14</sup> Rappaport defines the term 'ritual' to denote 'the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers' (1999, 24).

<sup>15</sup> This may be misleading in the sense that Rappaport does not give any special ontological significance to the numinous experience, whereas Otto clearly does so. In Rappaport's view, the only thing that is common to religious experience is that it is non-discursive (1971, 70). Thus no special category of 'religious experiences' exists. There are only experiences which are made 'religious' through their use in connection with religious concepts.

numinous experiences, on the other hand, are not discursive, but they are immediately material. They are actual states of being and therefore undeniable for those subject to them. The sacred postulates and numinous experiences are fused together in the participant's mind *in ritual activity*. In the process of ritual activity, the most abstract, mysterious and incomprehensible representations are bound to the most intimate, immediate and undeniable experiences of the participants. Therefore, the physical states of being induced by rituals in the members of a religious group are an important aspect of the special kind of meaning of the ultimate sacred postulates.

In other words, the mysterious religious representations actually denote the bodily states of being experienced by the participants of a religious ritual culture. This explains why the beliefs gain such an aura of irrefutability about them. In this context, it does not really matter what the experiences are, whether they be intense "peak experiences" or just calm contentment. Any perceivable change in one's emotional state could in principle be connected to the religious representations. However, it seems clear that there are also special states of awareness created by the physically and mentally demanding ritual acts that could lead to some special form of ecstatic or 'mystical' experience, of which the participant has no prior experience (cf. Pyysiäinen 2001b, 119-130).

Even if we are dealing with rather ordinary feelings and moods, they have a special feature that makes them particularly authoritative for us: we have very little conscious control over them and we do not always understand their origins. As expressed by LeDoux (1988, 22): "When we turn our mind's eye inward on our emotions, we find them at once obvious and mysterious. They are the states of our brain we know best and remember with the greatest clarity. Yet, sometimes we do not know where they come from." When religious ritual manages to evoke a previously unfamiliar ecstasy or just a background feeling of calm contentment and lucid well-being, they become easily connected to religious concepts (special agency, essences) since they originate in processes that are beyond our personal conscious control. Due to this association with feeling-states, the religious concepts gain "an aura of factuality" (Geertz 1973) that is hard to deny.

We can now see that it is precisely the emotion-affecting ritual acts which help to delimit the evocative potential of mysterious religious concepts. We can also see that it is not only the formal properties of religious representations that can make them more memorable or attention-grabbing. The memories are usually forged in ritual events and other emotional situations which the members of a religious community have undergone.

Thus, we may say that the religious symbolism involving the guru, and more broadly, the whole theological structure of ISKCON, is transmitted on the crest of the characteristic feelings and moods (i.e. background feelings) that the singing of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, encounters with the guru and ritual acts are capable of producing. The feeling created by the singing, dancing and ritual feasting is infectious. The conceptual mysteries themselves may leave one cold. The emotional

feelings and moods, in turn, may not be capable of forming a lasting impression unless combined with clearly articulated sacred postulates. The cross-cultural transmission of religious symbolism therefore involves a complex process of combining emotion-provoking rituals and/or memorable situations with relevant conceptual mysteries.

The feelings, moods and states of being induced by rituals are by their very nature something that humans are capable of achieving by virtue of their shared physiological constitution. What this means is that religious concepts, which show enormous variety and difference between cultures, are in fact grounded in something very tangible and pan-human: our own bodies and their biological functioning. The transmission of religious representations is a process that depends to a very large degree on the universal properties of human mind and body, which are recruited for the strengthening of highly unique religious conceptualisations.

## 9.7 Conclusion

In this section, I have looked at the observations of this study concerning the charisma of the founder of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement in the light of recent theoretical discussion within the cognitive science of religion. In the course of this discussion, I first presented a number of cognitive explanations for the phenomena described in the previous sections. In this way, it was shown how cognitive theories of the origins of religious symbolism, and various representations involving special kinds of agents, counterintuitiveness and essentialism could be applied to explain some of the findings.

However, I have also attempted to go beyond these theories in some significant respects. I argued that the theories of Boyer and Sperber have certain limitations in dealing with ethnographic evidence of the sort presented here. They are each geared towards explaining religion on a much more general level. Of all the evidence presented here, they only manage to cover a portion. Even then, some curious anomalies exist that the theories fail to adequately explain. Boyer's theory specifically limits counterintuitiveness to one violation, claiming that a combination of two or more violations per representation would seriously hamper the inferential potential of the concept. Certain guru representations were, however, shown to violate this rule.

For these reasons, I advanced some proposals of how to supplement these theories. The first of these was that charisma could also be seen as a form of sacredness. Sacredness alludes to the inviolability of certain religious concepts that have an important role in the religious cultural system as a whole. Although it has been impossible within the confines of this study to present a complete description of the Hare Kṛṣṇa culture, sufficient evidence exists to suggest that the guru-concept involves a significant position in the overall system and is therefore protected through secondary framing.



The second issue raised was the problematic role of emotion and religious experience in the transmission of charismatic representations. Neither Boyer's nor Sperber's theories give any significant role to the experiential aspect of religion. However, as I attempted to show, personal, intimate emotional states may figure strongly in the way religious representations are acquired and transmitted. The ritual life of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement is capable of producing both intense momentary feelings and more long-lasting mood changes. The long morning hours of chanting, singing, dancing and rejoicing in the profusely decorated temples filled with incense do have an effect on the participants. It is against this general affective background that the charismatic representations must be viewed. I do not believe that ISKCON would have been so successful in gaining converts without the intensity of the devotional routines.

## SECTION TEN

# Conclusions and future directions: cultural and pan-human cognitions in the transmission of religion

The nature of this study can largely be characterised as exploratory. The course of the argument has brought us into increasingly uncharted territories. This is especially striking with regard to the studies of new religious movements, but I have also indicated directions here that deviate from the standard cognitive theories of religion.

As was shown in the Introduction, most of the previous studies have started with the assumption that the Hare Kṛṣṇa culture can most profitably be analysed in terms of the Western cultural situation of the 60's and early 70's. According to this point of view, the Hare Kṛṣṇa world view offered a viable channel of protest for the alienated Western youth. While the hippie culture never developed more organised forms of life-style and sustained forms of protest, ISKCON, by contrast, offered just these. However, what was left unexplored by most of the studies was that by choosing this option, protesters had to change their ideological stance about 180 degrees, from an ultra-liberal view to an authoritarian and conservative one.

It is also evident that each decade since the 60's has brought new forms of Eastern religious movements to the West, even though the cultural unrest of the 60's has long since waned (see Ketola 2000). The Hare Kṛṣṇa movement has also proven to be highly resilient, although the increase in membership has not been quite so spectacular as in the initial years (see Rochford 1995).

I have argued that the issue of ideological protest may have been given an exaggerated role in the rise of new religious movements. For this reason, I have tried to take as close a look as possible at the charisma of the founder of the movement. Now that a sufficiently detailed picture of this elusive quality has been gained, we may try to give a more balanced account of the dynamics of the transmission of the Vaiṣṇava theology and practice from East to West.

### 10.1 Problems in the standard account

As became evident over the course of analysing the doctrines and rituals of the movement, ISKCON represents an ancient tradition within the Hindu culture that has been transplanted into various non-Indian cultures. The spread of the movement was launched from New York in the mid-1960's. The first disciples were Americans and the majority of the leadership still consists of Americans. ISKCON therefore represents an interesting case of belief transmission from one cultural environment to another.

Within the social sciences, it has traditionally been assumed that culture is a unitary entity that depends on social learning, is exhaustive of practically all adult mental organisation and results in vast intergroup differences (Tooby and Cosmides 1992, 115). This picture, however, tends to lead to an exaggerated view of cultural differences and within-group similarities. Thus, cultures easily become essentialised as entity-like superorganisms, which in the final analysis, determine all human actions and understandings. Accordingly, a methodological rule of thumb is that if, for instance, Americans turn into Hare Kṛṣṇa followers, the reason for this must be sought in the American culture. In fact, there is really no other alternative, since according to this conception, all human mental contents are more or less culturally determined. From this vantage point, it becomes quite impossible to appreciate "other" cultures on their own terms. Thus, the Indian culture could not have its own intrinsic attraction for Americans and Europeans. The only possible viewpoint for a social scientist is to analyse the American and European cultures to determine why their members find some "exotic" culture attractive.

The argument has been presented forcefully by an American theologian, Harvey Cox (1977). He claims that the various "neo-Oriental" movements have altered the Oriental original so profoundly that there is nothing to be gained by viewing them in terms of their classical ancestry. To quote Cox: "By now most of them are Western movements and are best understood as such" (1977, 18).

This form of argumentation has also been enormously popular within the sociological and anthropological studies of new religious movements. In a review of theories that attempt to account for the rise of these movements, Thomas Robbins concludes that many of the theories tend to be crisis or modernisation theories. "They tend to pinpoint some acute and distinctively modern dislocation which is said to be producing some mode of alienation, anomie or deprivation to which Americans are responding by searching for new structures of meaning and community" (Robbins 1988, 60). As we saw in the Introduction, the classical interpretation of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement by Judah (1974a) falls squarely within this paradigm.

The implication which this train of thought easily carries with it is that other cultures are found attractive because the *Western* images of purer and more hu-

mane forms of life are projected onto them. Primitivism and orientalism are simply the products of Western, post-enlightenment cultures (see e.g. Diem and Lewis 1992). The circle cannot be broken. Whatever the Western adherents of oriental religions find attractive, the social scientist is able to reduce to contemporary Western cultural dynamics. It is, however, seldom recognised that the isolation and insulation of cultures from each other is built into the very premises of this circular argument.

## 10.2 Rethinking ‘culture’

To circumvent this impasse one first needs to take a critical look at the concept of ‘culture’ and the explanatory models of cultural phenomena it entails.

Anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (1996, 30) has observed that the concept of ‘culture’, the anthropological concept *par excellence*, is increasingly under attack within the discipline itself. The growing uneasiness of anthropologists with the concept seems to be linked with the very success of its popularisation outside the purely academic circles. The culture, it seems, is everywhere. However, it is also more contested than ever.

One of the reasons for the scholarly uneasiness seems to spring from the process of globalisation, the increased long-distance interconnectedness between continents and national boundaries. As expressed by Hannerz:

For quite some time, language has probably dominated our thinking about cultural boundaries, since it has coincided with notions of nation, and the active involvement in other symbolic modes — music, gesture, and others, and their combinations — has tended to be mainly confined to local, face-to-face settings. Now that media technology is increasingly able to deal with other symbolic modes, however, we may wonder whether imagined communities are increasingly moving beyond words. [...] *Could there be affinities which allow us, for example, to appreciate what Nigerians or Indonesians do as they sing or dance, even as what they say when they speak sounds to us as only gibberish?* (Ibid., 21-22, my emphasis.)

If it is the case that each symbolic mode has its own boundaries of intelligibility, as Hannerz suspects, then the notion of the boundaries of “a culture” as a self-evident package of spatial location, population, political organisation and meaningful forms becomes obsolete.

A prominent form of argument within the anthropological circles claims that by accounting for and focusing on cultural differences, anthropology simultaneously helps to produce and maintain these very differences (e.g. Aby-Lughod 1991). The notion of difference, coupled with a static view of culture, is often linked with power imbalances and forms of dehumanisation. At the same time,

Hannerz recognises that the standard anthropological images of the infinite malleability of human nature have been criticised by researchers from the camp of biosciences (ibid., 31).

With the help of Robert Redfield's (1962, 444) table of human characteristics, Hannerz then describes the options for a revised culture concept more systematically (see Table 7). Redfield's table of human characteristics is produced by the contrast between modes of thought and action which are biologically inherited and those which are acquired in some other fashion. The other axis then distinguishes different degrees of distribution of various modes of thought and action. The resulting diagram shows six different boxes into which any item of thought and behaviour can be classified.

Table 7 *Human characteristics*

	<i>Inherent</i>	<i>Acquired</i>
<b>Individual</b>	1	2
<b>Enduring collectivities</b>	3	4
<b>Universal (pan-human)</b>	5	6

(Source: adapted from Hannerz 1996, 33, and Redfield 1962, 444.)

In this way, one can see that what is universal in human biological constitution belongs in box 5, whereas genetic differences between individuals belong in box 1. The racist hypothesis which attempts to account for differences between human groups in terms of genetic inheritance belongs in box 3, which is, expectedly, the most contested place to locate any human thought or action.

Most of anthropological disputes have been centred on the relative weight of boxes 4 and 6. That is to say, the tacit hypothesis has almost always been that the most interesting forms of human cultural behaviour are among acquired characteristics. What is disputed, however, is whether these acquired characteristics are acquired anytime and anywhere due to similar experiences (box 6), or whether they are characteristic of particular communities (box 4) (Hannerz, 1996, 34).

As Hannerz recognises, the recent opposition to the concept of culture centres almost entirely on a concept that locates human characteristics exclusively in box 4. However, where the critics themselves would like to move these is either to box 2 or box 6. Within anthropology, opinion still favours in the acquired side of the great divide. Redfield himself seems to have opted for the generous view that "everything to the right *is* cultural" (quoted in Hannerz 1996, 35). Hannerz goes largely along this view. He also seems to be somewhat disinterested in the

contents of boxes 1, 3 and 5. Views that put emphasis on these dimensions may need assistance from the discipline of evolutionary psychology.

In an illuminating analysis of the culture concept, evolutionary psychologists John Tooby and Leda Cosmides (1992) distinguish between three different sets of human understandings. *Pan-human understandings* include those phenomena that are expressions of our universal psychological and physiological properties in interaction with the structure of our social and non-social environments (1992, 117-118).<sup>16</sup> Thus, boxes 5 and 6 especially seem to be implied here. These are the human universals, ideas and practices that are found everywhere. To take a simple example: humans everywhere produce and enjoy music.

However, to account for the contents of box 4, Tooby and Cosmides present a highly original distinction. Firstly, *evoked understandings* include the class of cultural phenomena which differ among populations and which are expressions of universal capacities present in human psychology that happen to be activated by contingent circumstances. Thus, the contents of box 4 may be due to the contents of box 5. Since human beings respond to their local environments with complex inherited cognitive mechanisms, differences in cultural ideas may be explained as resulting from the local environments in interaction with the pan-human structures of mind. In other words, observed differences do not by themselves establish that the organisation of human life results merely from cultural input. (Ibid., 115-117.)

Secondly, to distinguish the category of shared understandings resulting from massive cultural input, Tooby and Cosmides use the term *transmitted* or *acquired culture*. Transmitted culture includes those representations which are usually deemed paradigmatically cultural, i.e. expressions of free human creativity for which it is difficult to posit any direct links with evolutionary pressures.

With regard to religion, the obvious question is: how do we account for widely distributed religious thoughts and actions?

### **10.3 Towards an alternative view on the transmission of new religious understandings**

Religious representations certainly show massive cultural differences. It also seems that the religious representations are not excessively constrained by experience and logical coherence. They often belong to the category of elaborate concepts or reflective beliefs rather than that of basic concepts. Thus, it certainly

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<sup>16</sup> Tooby and Cosmides actually use the term 'metaculture' for this order of representations. In my opinion, it may, however, be a possible source of confusion to speak about "culture" in the case of pan-human mental organisation, since the traditional concept of culture is so heavily tied to the notion of differences between groups. Here I will restrict the term 'culture' to those understandings, behaviours and artefacts that show marked differences between populations.

seems that religious representations, by virtue of their formal properties, belong mostly to the category of acquired culture (boxes 2, 4 and 6).

However, as I have been trying to show, the dynamics of transmission in the case of charismatic representations in the Hare Kṛṣṇa culture include several processes which seem to require the activation of pan-human and evoked understandings, rather than simply cultural learning. First of all, the charismatic person is frequently described in a way that has been categorised under the label of 'frame violations'. In the Goffmanian scheme, primary frames are universal human mental equipment, by which people make sense of their everyday experience. Frame violations in turn are experiences, which, at least on the surface, seem to violate the deeply and unconsciously held expectations determined by the presence of such frames. The experiences of surprise, puzzlement, curiosity and even amusement evoked by such primary frame violations may well be at the root of a number of pan-cultural forms of entertainment and sources of interest. They may also be at the root of such phenomena as religious revelation, sense of mystery and sudden conversions.

That these frame violations, in turn, have been shown to be deeply connected to the special conceptualisations of agency that can be found attached to a host of charismatic representations. Essentialism, again, is a frequent strategy of thinking that can be found in a whole host of domains and in all parts of the world. Racial and gender stereotypes are a characteristic result of spontaneous essentialism. What this study has shown is that the representations of religious social categories, such as the guru, are clearly typified by essentialistic representations. Again, no cultural learning is necessarily required. When people are exposed to certain kinds of cues, they often spontaneously produce essentialistic representations.

Rituals and ceremonies can also be conceptualised in terms of Goffmanian secondary framing — a process, which, again can be met in all human populations world over. There is no human culture without forms of play-acting, whether this is understood as being serious (ritual), or non-serious (play) (see Handelman 1977). By secondary frames, people can radically transform the meaning of the activities they are performing or observing. Multifarious forms of entertainment and social ceremony depend on secondary framing, which in turn depends on pan-human capacities for meta-communication and meta-representation.

Lastly, the performances of rituals may activate basic emotional responses and even more unusual forms of neural activity, resulting in some forms of religious experience. The moods and states of mind created by melodious songs, rhythmic bodily movements, various fragrances and visual stimuli are inseparable parts of the religious representations which may involve different objects and agents. It is not impossible that the moods initially produced in the context of rituals are evoked by the presence of the guru or symbols denoting him. The moods in turn may, at least partly, be capable of being experienced independently of cultural tuition, due to our universal physical constitution.

What I am trying to suggest here is that the paradigmatically transmitted forms of culture, such as religion, very often contain strong elements of evoked and/or pan-human understandings. The transmission of religious representations is therefore closely tied to universal human mental organisation. Religious concepts are deeply connected to basic forms of human thought and experiencing.

Secondly, religious concepts characteristically originate in cognitive processes that are beyond our capacity of conscious inspection and explication. It is very difficult to consciously inspect the processes leading to intuitions of agency, essence, framing, or to various moods. These arise spontaneously, which for some individuals signal a sort of self-evidence or certainty. Religious concepts, by the very virtue of their haziness, mysteriousness and counterintuitiveness are able to evoke these basic forms of intuitive thinking. Without the backing of intuitive processes, these concepts hardly be as successful and infectious as they sometimes are.

#### 10.4 Conclusion

It may be no accident that the spread of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement started its exponential growth immediately after the first public chanting in the Tompkins Square Park in New York. The simple and catchy tune of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra sung by a group of devotees immediately caught the attention of a surprisingly wide audience who had no knowledge of what the group stood for in ideological terms. As Prabhupāda knew well, singing, dancing and feasting is infectious, even if the theology was far beyond the conscious acceptance of his audiences. No doubt the fact that both Prabhupāda and the hippies were against the establishment — albeit for different reasons — accounted for their mutual attraction to a considerable degree. However, they were also connected through a mutual fondness for artistic and musical expression, which Prabhupāda quickly recognised and exploited. He even appeared at rock concerts and other hippie gatherings, leading tumultuous *kīrtanas* (see Hayagriva 1985, 141-143).

This part of the process was clearly conscious and deliberate. However, there were analogous processes which were not deliberate, and yet followed the same paradigm: exposure of the audiences to actions and images, which evoked powerful basic intuitions. The intuitions of special agency, essence, hierarchy, purity, etc., are very basic forms of human understanding.

It is these intuitions that catch on like harmonious tunes. We cannot consciously inspect the process whereby some melody persists in our mind. Even with extensive training in music, it is difficult to know why we like some melodies and dislike others. Similarly, the origin of charismatic perceptions eludes our conscious analysis. What can be observed is the end result of the process — this is to say, characteristic religious representations, which are inscribed with mysteriousness. No amount of rationalising theology can completely divest itself of this mys-



teriousness. The more this is attempted, the more the concepts lose their evocative power.

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# Glossary

**Ācamana**, ritual purification by sipping water and chanting mantras.

**Ācārya**, (1) ideal guru who teaches by example; (2) founder of a spiritual institution.

**Āratī**, offering of lamps and other items to an object of worship.

**Arcana**, temple worship.

**Āsana**, seat or posture, as in yoga.

**Āśrama**, (1) hermitage; (2) stage in life in the traditional Indian four-fold scheme: *brahmacarya*, (student), *grhastha* (householder), *vānaprastha* (retirement), and *sannyāsa* (renunciation).

**Ātman**, self or soul.

**Avatāra**, descent (expansion, incarnation) of God in a bodily form.

**Avidyā**, ignorance.

**Balarāma**, (Baladeva), the elder brother of Kṛṣṇa.

**Bhagavān**, the Supreme Lord.

**Bhajana**, devotional recitation.

**Bhakti**, loving devotion, usually translated as ‘devotional service’ in ISKCON.

**Bhakti-yoga**, yoga of devotion; linking oneself to God through devotional service.

**Brahmā**, one of the main gods in the Hindu pantheon; secondary creator of the material universe in ISKCON theology.

**Brahmā-Madhva-Gauḍīya saṁpradāya**, a Vaisnava denomination deriving from the reformer Caitanya in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; the Vaisnava tradition to which ISKCON belongs.

**Brahmacārī**, celibate student of a guru.

**Brahman**, impersonal absolute.

**Brāhmaṇa**, member of the highest (priestly) class in traditional Hindu society.

**Cāmara**, yak-tail whisk used in temple worship.

**Capātī**, flat bread made of wheat.

**Caraṇāmṛta**, bath-water of the deities, an auspicious liquid which is offered to devotees during worship.

**Chādar**, shawl.

**Darśana**, audience of God (in the form of an image) or a saint.

**Dāsa** (f. *dāsī*), servant; often part of proper name.

**Deity**, see *mūrti*.

**Dīkṣa-guru**, initiating guru.

**Dharma**, duty, (spiritual) law, religion.

**Dhotī**, traditional Indian garment worn by men, a simple cloth wrapped around the lower body.

**Dīkṣā**, formal initiation.

**Dīkṣa-guru**, initiating guru.

**Gamchā**, cloth tied around the waist (e.g. for bathing).

**Gaudiya Math**, the religious institution founded by Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura, the guru of A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda.

**Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism**, form of Vaisnavism prominent in Bengal (from ‘Gauda’, an ancient name for Bengal).

**Gāyatrī mantra**, prayer given by guru in second initiation to be chanted silently at sunrise, noon and sunset.

**Ghee**, clarified butter.

**Gopīs**, Kṛṣṇa’s cowherd girlfriends.

**Govinda**, ‘finder of the cows’, another name for Kṛṣṇa.

**Grhastha**, householder, the second stage of life in traditional Indian society.

**Guru**, teacher, esp. spiritual teacher and instructor, usually translated as ‘spiritual master’ in ISKCON.

**Guru-pūjā**, regular method of worship of the guru.

**Hare**, vocative form of Harā, the internal energy of Kṛṣṇa (Rādhā) according to ISKCON theology.

**Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra**, the great chant for deliverance: Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare.

**Harināma saṅkīrtana**, congregational chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra.

**ISKCON**, acronym for the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

**Jagannātha**, particular form of Kṛṣṇa worshipped at Purī.

**Janmāṣṭamī**, celebration of Kṛṣṇa’s birthday.

**Japa**, soft recitation of mantra.

**Jaya**, an exclamation meaning “victory” or “glory”.

**Jīva**, living entity.

**Jñāna**, ‘knowledge’, esp. spiritual wisdom.

**Kali-yuga**, age of quarrel and strife.

**Kaniṣṭha-adhikārī**, devotee at the middle stage of devotion.

**Karatālas**, hand cymbals.

**Karma**, lit. ‘action’, material activity and its reactions.

**Karmī**, person engaged in material activities, a materialist.

**Kīrtana**, chanting the holy names of God.

**Kṛṣṇa**, the “Supreme Personality of Godhead”; i.e. supreme being in ISKCON theology.

**Lakṣmī**, goddess of fortune, Viṣṇu’s consort.

- Līlā**, transcendental “pastimes” of Kṛṣṇa or spiritually advanced devotees.
- Madhyama-adhikārī**, devotee at the beginning stage of devotion.
- Mahā-mantra**, see Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra.
- Mahārāja**, king, a honorific term used by Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees to address *sannyāsīs* and gurus.
- Maṅgala-āratī**, daily pre-dawn worship.
- Mantra**, spiritually powerful word-formula.
- Maṭha**, monastery.
- Māyā**, illusion; the external energy of Kṛṣṇa according to ISKCON theology.
- Māyāvādī**, follower of an impersonalist doctrine of God.
- Mokṣa**, liberation from the repeated cycle of birth and death.
- Mṛdaṅga**, tubular, two headed clay drum.
- Mūrti**, authorised image or figure (lit. ‘embodiment’) of God.
- Nitāi**, short form of Nityananda, one of Caitanya’s associates.
- Nitya siddha**, eternally perfect devotee.
- Pañca-tattva**, lit. ‘five principles’; Caitanya and his four principal associates depicted in pictures or *mūrtis*.
- Paramātmā**, supersoul; the form of God residing in one’s heart.
- Paramparā**, spiritual lineage of teachers, disciplic succession.
- Prabhu**, ‘master’, mildly honorific term used by devotees to address male devotees of equal rank.
- Praṇāma mantra**, special mantra or prayer addressed to one’s own guru.
- Prasāda**, food or other items sanctified by having been offered to God.
- Prema-dhvanī prayers**, prayers of glorification, usually sung at the end of services.
- Pūjā**, worship.
- Pūjārī**, temple priest.
- Rādhā**, (also Rādhārāṇī) Kṛṣṇa’s consort.
- Ratha-yātrā**, cart festival in which the images of God are carried in festive procession.
- Rtvik-guru**, person who officiates on behalf of one’s own guru.
- Sādhu**, holy man, ascetic, saintly person.
- Sampradāya**, tradition, school, sect.
- Samsāra**, repeated cycle of birth and death.
- Sanṁkīrtana**, congregational chanting of God’s holy names; in ISKCON refers more often to book distribution.
- Sannyāsa**, renunciation, stage in life in the traditional Indian society.
- Sannyāsī**, member of the renounced order of life.
- Śāstra**, revealed scriptures.
- Śikhā**, tuft a hair worn by the male devotees at the back of the head.
- Śikṣā-guru**, guru who gives instruction in spiritual life.
- Śūdra**, servant, manual laborer, the lowest class of traditional Indian social structure.

**Swami**, (*svāmī*) title of a member of the renounced order of life.

**Tilaka**, sectarian clay markings placed by devotees on the forehead and other parts of the body.

**Tulasī**, sacred basil, a small tree sacred to Viṣṇu.

**Upacāra**, item of worship.

**Uttama-adhikārī**, devotee at the most advanced stage of devotion.

**Vaiṣṇava**, devotee of Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa.

**Vartma-pradarsaka-guru**, guru who “shows the way”, i.e., the person who first inspires one towards spiritual life.

**Viṣṇu**, one of the main Hindu gods; an expansion of Kṛṣṇa according to ISKCON theology.

**Vṛndāvana**, (1) Kṛṣṇa’s eternal abode; (2) the Indian village in which Kṛṣṇa enacted His childhood pastimes.

**Vyāsa**, proper name of a vedic sage credited for the compilation of the four *Vedas*, the *Purāṇas*, the *Vedānta-sūtra* and the *Mahābhārata*.

**Vyāsa-pūjā**, more elaborate worship of the guru as a representative of Vyāsa, performed in ISKCON on the guru’s birthday.

**Vyāsāsana**, lit. ‘seat of Vyāsa’, the lecture seat in ISKCON temples.

**Yoga**, religious practice.

**Yuga**, world era.

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